ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

Pocket Edition

MILTON



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TORONTO

ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

MILTON

BY

MARK PATTISON

CONTENTS

FIRST PERIOD. 1608—1639

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

SECOND PERIOD. 1640—1660.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

THIRD PERIOD. 1660—1674.

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

MILTON

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FIRST PERIOD. 1608—1639.

CHAPTER I.

FAMILY—SCHOOL—COLLEGE.

In the seventeenth century it was not the custom to publish two volumes upon every man or woman whose name had appeared on a title-page. Nor, where lives of authors were written, were they written with the redundancy of particulars which is now allowed. Especially are the lives of the poets and dramatists obscure and meagrely recorded. Of Milton, however, we know more personal details than of any man of letters of that age. Edward Phillips, the poet's nephew, who was brought up by his uncle, and lived in habits of intercourse with him to the last, wrote a life, brief, inexact, superficial, but valuable from the nearness of the writer to the subject of his memoir. A cotemporary of Milton, John Aubrey (b. 1625), "a very honest man, and accurate in his accounts of matters of fact," as Toland says of him, made it his business to learn all he could about Milton's habits. Aubrey was himself

acquainted with Milton, and diligently catechised the poet's widow, his brother, and his nephew, scrupulously writing down each detail as it came to him, in the minutes of lives which he supplied to Antony Wood to be worked up in his *Athenæ* and *Fasti*. Aubrey was only an antiquarian collector, and was mainly dependent on what could be learned from the family. None of Milton's family, and least of all Edward Phillips, were of a capacity to apprehend moral or mental qualities, and they could only tell Aubrey of his goings out and his comings in, of the clothes he wore, the dates of events, the names of his acquaintance. In compensation for the want of observation on the part of his own kith and kin, Milton himself, with a superb and ingenuous egotism, has revealed the secret of his thoughts and feelings in numerous autobiographical passages of his prose writings. From what he directly communicates, and from what he unconsciously betrays, we obtain an internal life of the mind, more ample than that external life of the bodily machine, which we owe to Aubrey and Phillips.

In our own generation all that printed books or written documents have preserved about Milton has been laboriously brought together by Professor David Masson, in whose *Life of Milton* we have the most exhaustive biography that ever was compiled of any Englishman. It is a noble and final monument erected to the poet's memory, two centuries after his death. My excuse for attempting to write of Milton after Mr. Masson is that his life is in six volumes octavo, with a total of some four to five thousand pages. The present outline is written for a different class of readers, those, namely, who cannot afford to know more of Milton than can be told in some two hundred and fifty pages.

A family of Miltons, deriving the name in all probability from the parish of Great Milton near Thame, is found in various branches spread over Oxfordshire and the adjoining counties in the reign of Elizabeth. The poet's grandfather was a substantial yeoman, living at Stanton St. John, about five miles from Oxford, within the forest of Shotover, of which he was also an under-ranger. The ranger's son John was at school in Oxford, possibly as a chorister, conformed to the Established Church, and was in consequence cast off by his father, who adhered to the old faith. The disinherited son went up to London, and by the assistance of a friend was set up in business as a scrivener. A scrivener discharged some of the functions which, at the present day, are undertaken for us in a solicitor's office. John Milton the father, being a man of probity and force of character, was soon on the way to acquire "a plentiful fortune." But he continued to live over his shop, which was in Bread Street, Cheapside, and which bore the sign of the Spread Eagle, the family crest.

It was at the Spread Eagle that his eldest son, John Milton, was born, 9th December, 1608, being thus exactly cotemporary with Lord Clarendon, who also died in the same year as the poet. Milton must be added to the long roll of our poets who have been natives of the city which now never sees sunlight or blue sky, along with Chaucer, Spenser, Herrick, Cowley, Shirley, Ben Jonson, Pope, Gray, Keats. Besides attending as a day-scholar at St. Paul's School, which was close at hand, his father engaged for him a private tutor at home. The household of the Spread Eagle not only enjoyed civic prosperity, but some share of that liberal cultivation, which, if not imbibed in the home, neither school nor college ever confers. The scrivener was not

only an amateur in music, but a composer, whose tunes, songs, and airs found their way into the best collections of music. Both schoolmaster and tutor were men of mark. The high master of St. Paul's at that time was Alexander Gill, an M.A. of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, who was "esteemed to have such an excellent way of training up youth, that none in his time went beyond it." The private tutor was Thomas Young, who was, or had been, curate to Mr. Gataker, of Rotherhithe, itself a certificate of merit, even if we had not the pupil's emphatic testimony of gratitude. Milton's fourth elegy is addressed to Young, when, in 1627, he was settled at Hamburg, crediting him with having first infused into his pupil a taste for classic literature and poetry. Biographers have derived Milton's Presbyterianism in 1641 from the lessons twenty years before of this Thomas Young, a Scotchman, and one of the authors of the *Smectymnuus*. This, however, is a misreading of Milton's mind—a mind which was an organic whole—"whose seed was in itself," self-determined; not one whose opinions can be accounted for by contagion or casual impact.

Of Milton's boyish exercises two have been preserved. They are English paraphrases of two of the Davidic Psalms, and were done at the age of fifteen. That they were thought by himself worth printing in the same volume with *Comus*, is the most noteworthy thing about them. No words are so commonplace but that they can be made to yield inference by a biographer. And even in these school exercises we think we can discern that the future poet was already a diligent reader of Sylvester's *Du Bartas* (1605), the patriarch of Protestant poetry, and of Fairfax's *Tasso* (1600). There are other indications that, from very early years, poetry had assumed

a place in Milton's mind, not merely as a juvenile pastime, but as an occupation of serious import.

Young Gill, son of the high master, a school-fellow of Milton, went up to Trinity, Oxford, where he got into trouble by being informed against by Chillingworth, who reported incautious political speeches of Gill to his godfather, Laud. With Gill Milton corresponded; they exchanged their verses, Greek, Latin, and English, with a confession on Milton's part that he prefers English and Latin composition to Greek; that to write Greek verses in this age is to sing to the deaf. Gill, Milton finds "a severe critic of poetry, however disposed to be lenient to his friend's attempts."

If Milton's genius did not announce itself in his paraphrases of Psalms, it did in his impetuosity in learning, "which I seized with such eagerness that from the twelfth year of my age, I scarce ever went to bed before midnight." Such is his own account. And it is worth notice that we have here an incidental test of the trustworthiness of Aubrey's reminiscences. Aubrey's words are, "When he was very young he studied very hard, and sate up very late, commonly till twelve or one o'clock at night; and his father ordered the maid to sit up for him."

He was ready for college at sixteen, not earlier than the usual age at that period. As his schoolmasters, both the Gills, were Oxford men (Young was of St. Andrew's), it might have been expected that the young scholar would have been placed at Oxford. However, it was determined that he should go to Cambridge, where he was admitted a pensioner of Christ's, 12th February, 1625, and commenced residence in the Easter term ensuing. Perhaps his father feared the growing High Church, or, as it was

then called, Arminianism, of his own university. It so happened, however, that the tutor to whom the young Milton was consigned was specially noted for Arminian proclivities. This was William Chappell, then Fellow of Christ's, who so recommended himself to Laud by his party zeal, that he was advanced to be Provost of Dublin and Bishop of Cork.

Milton was one of those pupils who are more likely to react against a tutor than to take a ply from him. A preaching divine—Chappell composed a treatise on the art of preaching—a narrow ecclesiastic of the type loved by Laud, was exactly the man who would drive Milton into opposition. But the tutor of the seventeenth century was not able, like the easy-going tutor of the eighteenth, to leave the young rebel to pursue the reading of his choice in his own chamber. Chappell endeavoured to drive his pupil along the scholastic highway of exercises. Milton, returning to Cambridge after his summer vacation, eager for the acquisition of wisdom, complains that he "was dragged from his studies, and compelled to employ himself in composing some frivolous declamation!" Indocile, as he confesses himself (indocilisque ætas prava magistra fuit), he kicked against either the discipline or the exercises exacted by college rules. He was punished. Aubrey had heard that he was flogged, a thing not impossible in itself, as the *Admonition Book* of Emanuel gives an instance of corporal chastisement as late as 1667. Aubrey's statement, however, is a dubitative interlineation in his MS., and Milton's age, seventeen, as well as the silence of his later detractors, who raked up everything which could be told to his disadvantage, concur to make us hesitate to accept a fact on so slender evidence. Anyhow, Milton was sent away from college for a time, in the

year 1627, in consequence of something unpleasant which had occurred. That it was something of which he was not ashamed is clear, from his alluding to it himself in the lines written at the time,—

> Nec duri libet usque minas perferre magistri
> Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo.

And that the tutor was not considered to have been wholly free from blame is evident from the fact that the master transferred Milton from Chappell to another tutor, a very unusual proceeding. Whatever the nature of the punishment, it was not what is known as rustication; for Milton did not lose a term, taking his two degrees of B.A. and M.A. in regular course, at the earliest date from his matriculation permitted by the statutes. The one outbreak of juvenile petulance and indiscipline over, Milton's force of character and unusual attainments acquired him the esteem of his seniors. The nickname of "the lady of Christ's," given him in derision by his fellow-students, is an attestation of virtuous conduct. Ten years later, in 1642, Milton takes an opportunity to "acknowledge publicly, with all grateful mind, that more than ordinary respect which I found, above many of my equals, at the hands of those courteous and learned men, the Fellows of that college wherein I spent some years; who, at my parting after I had taken two degrees, as the manner is, signified many ways how much better it would content them that I would stay; as by many letters full of kindness and loving respect, both before that time and long after, I was assured of their singular good affection towards me."

The words "how much better it would content them that I would stay" have been thought to hint at the

offer of a fellowship at Christ's. It is highly improbable that such an offer was ever made. There had been two vacancies in the roll of fellows since Milton had become eligible by taking his B.A. degree, and he had been passed over in favour of juniors. It is possible that Milton was not statutably eligible, for, by the statutes of Christ's, there could not be, at one time, more than two fellows who were natives of the same county. Edward King, who was Milton's junior, was put in, not by college election, but by royal mandate. And in universities generally, it is not literature or general acquirements which recommend a candidate for endowed posts, but technical skill in the prescribed exercises, and a pedagogic intention.

Further than this, had a fellowship in his college been attainable, it would not have had much attraction for Milton. A fellowship implied two things, residence in college, with teaching, and orders in the church. With neither of these two conditions was Milton prepared to comply. In 1632, when he proceeded to his M.A. degree, Milton was twenty-four, he had been seven years in college, and had therefore sufficient experience what college life was like. He who was so impatient of the "turba legentum prava" in the Bodleian library, could not have patiently consorted with the vulgar-minded and illiterate ecclesiastics, who peopled the colleges of that day. Even Mede, though the author of *Clavis Apocalyptica* was steeped in the soulless clericalism of his age, could not support his brother-fellows without frequent retirements to Balsham, "being not willing to be joined with such company." To be dependent upon Bainbrigge's (the Master of Christ's) good pleasure for a supply of pupils; to have to live in daily intercourse

with the Powers and the Chappells, such as we kno
them from Mede's letters, was an existence to whic
only the want of daily bread could have driven Milton
Happily his father's circumstances were not such as to
make a fellowship pecuniarily an object to the son. If he
longed for "the studious cloister's pale," he had been, now
for seven years, near enough to college life to have dispelled the dream that it was a life of lettered leisure and
philosophic retirement. It was just about Milton's time
that the college tutor finally supplanted the university
professor, a system which implied the substitution of
excercises performed by the pupil for instruction given
by the teacher. Whatever advantages this system
brought with it, it brought inevitably the degradation of
the teacher, who was thus dispensed from knowledge,
having only to attend to form. The time of the college
tutor was engrossed by the details of scholastic superintendence, and the frivolous worry of academical busi-
ness. Admissions, matriculations, disputations, declama-
ions, the formalities of degrees, public reception of royal
nd noble visitors, filled every hour of his day, and left
o time, even if he had had the taste, for private study.
o teaching, as we shall see, Milton was far from averse.
t then it must be teaching as he understood it, a teach-
which should expand the intellect and raise the cha-
er, not dexterity in playing with the verbal formulær
he disputations of the schools.

ch an occupation could have no attractions for one
was even now meditating *Il Penseroso* (composed
). At twenty he had already confided to his school-
, the younger Gill, the secret of his discontent
the Cambridge tone. "Here among us," he writes
ollege, "are barely one or two who do not flutter

off, all unfledged, into theology, having gotten of philology or of philosophy scarce so much as a smattering. And for theology they are content with just what is enough to enable them to patch up a paltry sermon." He retained the same feeling towards his Alma Mater in 1641, when he wrote (Reason of Church Government), "Cambridge, which as in the time of her better health, and mine own younger judgment, I never greatly admired, so now much less . . . ."

On a review of all these indications of feeling, I should conclude that Milton never had serious thoughts of a college fellowship, and that his antipathy arose from a sense of his own incompatibility of temper with academic life, and was not, like Phineas Fletcher's, the result of disappointed hopes, and a sense of injury for having been refused a fellowship at King's. One consideration which remains to be mentioned would alone be decisive in favour of this view. A fellowship required orders. Milton had been intended for the church, and had been sent to college with that view. By the time he left Cambridge, at twenty-four, it had become clear, both to himself and his family, that he could never submit his understanding to the trammels of church formularies. His later mind, about 1641, is expressed by himself in his own forcible style,—"The church, to whose service by the intention of my parents and friends I was destined of a child, and in mine own resolutions, till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded in the church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, . . . I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing." When he took

leave of the university, in 1632, he had perhaps not developed this distinct antipathy to the establishment. For in a letter, preserved in Trinity College, and written in the winter of 1631-32, he does not put forward any conscientious objections to the clerical profession, but only apologises to the friend to whom the letter is addressed, for delay in making choice of some profession. The delay itself sprung from an unconscious distaste. In a mind of the consistent texture of Milton's, motives are secretly influential before they emerge in consciousness. We shall not be wrong in asserting that when he left Cambridge in 1632, it was already impossible, in the nature of things, that he should have taken orders in the Church of England, or a fellowship of which orders were a condition.

CHAPTER II.

RESIDENCE AT HORTON—L'ALLEGRO—IL PENSEROSO—ARCADES—COMUS—LYCIDAS.

MILTON had been sent to college to qualify for a profession. The church, the first intended, he had gradually discovered to be incompatible. Of the law, either his father's branch, or some other, he seems to have entertained a thought, but to have speedily dismissed it. So at the age of twenty-four he returned to his father's house, bringing nothing with him but his education and a silent purpose. The elder Milton had now retired from business, with sufficient means but not with wealth. Though John was the eldest son, there were two other children, a brother, Christopher, and a sister, Anne. To have no profession, even a nominal one, to be above trade and below the status of squire or yeoman, and to come home with the avowed object of leading an idle life, was conduct which required justification. Milton felt it to be so. In a letter addressed, in 1632, to some senior friend at Cambridge, name unknown, he thanks him for being "a good watchman to admonish that the hours of the night pass on, for so I call my life as yet obscure and unserviceable to mankind, and that the day with me is at hand,

wherein Christ commands all to labour." Milton has no misgivings. He knows that what he is doing with himself is the best he can do. His aim is far above bread-winning, and therefore his probation must be long. He destines for himself no indolent tarrying in the garden of Armida. His is a "mind made and set wholly on the accomplishment of greatest things." He knows that the looker-on will hardly accept his apology for "being late," *that it is in order to being "more fit."* Yet *it is the only* apology he can offer. And he is dissatisfied with his own progress. "I am something suspicious of myself, and do take notice of a certain belatedness in me."

Of this frame of mind the record is the second sonnet, lines which are an inseparable part of Milton's biography—

> *How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,*
> Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
> My hasting days fly on with full career,
> But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
> Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth
> That I to manhood am arrived so near,
> And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
> That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
> Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure even
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven
> All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.

With aspirations thus vast, though unformed, with "amplitude of mind to greatest deeds," Milton retired to his father's house in the country. Five more years of self-education, added to the seven years of academical residence, were not too much for the meditation of projects such as Milton was already conceiving. Years many

more than twelve, filled with great events and distracting interests, were to pass over before the body and shape of *Paradise Lost* was given to these imaginings.

The country retirement in which the elder Milton had fixed himself was the little village of Horton, situated in that southernmost angle of the county of Buckingham, which insinuates itself between Berks and Middlesex. Though London was only about seventeen miles distant, it was the London of Charles I., with its population of some 300,000 only; before coaches and macadamised roads; while the Colne, which flows through the village, was still a river, and not the kennel of a paper-mill. There was no lack of water and wood, meadow and pasture, closes and open field, with the regal towers of Windsor "bosom'd high in tufted trees," to crown the landscape. Unbroken leisure, solitude, tranquillity of mind, surrounded by the thickets and woods, which Pliny thought indispensable to poetical meditation (Epist. 9. 10), no poet's career was ever commenced under more favourable auspices. The youth of Milton stands in strong contrast with the misery, turmoil, chance medley, struggle with poverty, or abandonment to dissipation, which blighted the early years of so many of our men of letters.

Milton's life is a drama in three acts. The first discovers him in the calm and peaceful retirement of Horton, of which *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas* are the expression. In the second act he is breathing the foul and heated atmosphere of party passion and religious hate, generating the lurid fires which glare in the battailous canticles of his prose pamphlets. The three great poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, are the utterance of his final period of solitary and Promethean grandeur, when, blind, destitute, friend-

less, he testified of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, alone before a fallen world.

In this delicious retirement of Horton, in alternate communing with nature and with books, for five years of persevering study he laid in a stock, not of learning, but of what is far above learning, of wide and accurate knowledge. Of the man whose profession is learning, it is characteristic that knowledge is its own end, and research its own reward. To Milton all knowledge, all life, virtue itself, was already only a means to a further end. He will know only "that which is of use to know," and by useful, he meant that which conduced to form him for his vocation of poet.

From a very early period Milton had taken poetry to be his vocation, in the most solemn and earnest mood. The idea of this devotion was the shaping idea of his life. It was, indeed, a bent of nature, with roots drawing from deeper strata of character than any act of reasoned will, which kept him out of the professions, and now fixed him, a seeming idler, but really hard at work, in his father's house at Horton. The intimation which he had

be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after times, as they should not willingly let it die."

What the ultimate form of his poetic utterance shall be, he is in no hurry to decide. He will be "long choosing," and quite content to be "beginning late." All his care at present is to qualify himself for the lofty function to which he aspires. No lawyer, physician, statesman, ever laboured to fit himself for his profession harder than

Milton strove to qualify himself for his vocation of poet. Verse-making is, to the wits, a game of ingenuity; to Milton, it is a prophetic office, towards which the will of heaven leads him. The creation he contemplates will not flow from him as the stanzas of the *Gerusalemme* did from Tasso at twenty-one. Before he can make a poem, Milton will make himself. "I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrated of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem . . . . not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that which is praiseworthy."

Of the spontaneity, the abandon, which are supposed to be characteristic of the poetical nature, there is nothing here; all is moral purpose, precision, self-dedication. So he acquires all knowledge, not for knowledge' sake, from the instinct of learning, the necessity for completeness, but because he is to be a poet. Nor will he only have knowledge, he will have wisdom; moral development shall go hand in hand with intellectual. A poet's soul should "contain of good, wise, just, the perfect shape." He will cherish continually a pure mind in a pure body. "I argued to myself that, if unchastity in a woman, whom St. Paul terms the glory of man, be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man, who is both the image and glory of God, it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable." There is yet a third constituent of the poetical nature; to knowledge and to virtue must be added religion. For it is from God that the poet's thoughts come. "This is not to be obtained but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit that can enrich with all utterance and knowledge,

and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous acts and affairs; till which in some measure be compast, I refuse not to sustain this expectation." Before the piety of this vow, Dr. Johnson's morosity yields for a moment, and he is forced to exclaim, "From a promise like this, at once fervid, pious, and rational, might be expected the *Paradise Lost.*"

Of these years of self-cultivation, of conscious moral architecture, such as Plato enacted for his ideal State, but none but Milton ever had the courage to practise, the biographer would gladly give a minute account. But the means of doing so are wanting. The poet kept no diary of his reading, such as some great students, e. g. Isaac Casaubon, have left. Nor could such a record, had it been attempted, have shown us the secret process by which the scholar's dead learning was transmuted in Milton's mind into living imagery. "Many studious and contemplative years, altogether spent in the search of religious and civil knowledge" is his own description of the period. "You make many inquiries as to what I am about;" he writes to Diodati—"what am I thinking of? Why, with God's help, of immortality! Forgive the word, I only whisper it in your ear! Yes, I am pluming my wings for a flight." This was in 1637, at the end of five years of the Horton probation. The poems, which, rightly read, are strewn with autobiographical hints, are not silent as to the intention of this period. In *Paradise Regained* (i. 196), Milton reveals himself. And in *Comus*, written at Horton, the lines 375 and following are charged with the same sentiment,—

And wisdom's self
Oft seeks to sweet retired solitude,
Where, with her best nurse, contemplation,
She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all-to ruffled and sometimes impair'd.

That at Horton Milton "read all the Greek and Latin writers" is one of Johnson's careless versions of Milton's own words, "enjoyed a complete holiday in turning over Latin and Greek authors." Milton read, not as a professional philologian, but as a poet and scholar, and always in the light of his secret purpose. It was not in his way to sit down to read over all the Greek and Latin writers, as Casaubon or Salmasius might do. Milton read with selection, and "meditated," says Aubrey, what he read. His practice conformed to the principle he has himself laid down in the often-quoted lines (*Paradise Regained*, iv. 322)—

Who reads
Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
Deep vers'd in books, and shallow in himself.

Some of Milton's Greek books have been traced; his *Aratus*, *Lycophron*, *Euripides* (the Stephanus of 1602), and his *Pindar* (the Benedictus of 1620), are still extant, with marginal memoranda, which should seem to evince careful and discerning reading. One critic even thought it worth while to accuse Joshua Barnes of silently appropriating conjectural emendations from Milton's *Euripides*. But Milton's own poems are the best evidence of his familiarity with all that is most choice in the remains of classic poetry. Though the commentators are accused of often seeing an imitation where there is none, no com-

mentary can point out the ever-present infusion of classical flavour, which bespeaks intimate converse far more than direct adaptation. Milton's classical allusions, says Hartley Coleridge, are amalgamated and consubstantiated with his native thought.

A commonplace book of Milton's, after having lurked unsuspected for 200 years in the archives of Netherby, has been disinterred in our own day (1874). It appears to belong partly to the end of the Horton period. It is not by any means an account of all that he is reading, but only an arrangement, under certain heads, or places of memoranda for future use. These notes are extracted from about eighty different authors, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and English. Of Greek authors no less than sixteen are quoted. The notes are mostly notes of historical facts, seldom of thoughts, never of mere verbal expression. There is no trace in it of any intention to store up either the imagery or the language of poetry. It may be that such notes were made and entered in another volume; for the book thus accidentally preserved to us seems to refer to other similar volumes of collections. But it is more likely that no such poetical memoranda were ever made, and that Milton trusted entirely to memory for the wealth of classical allusion with which his verse is surcharged. He did not extract from the poets and the great writers whom he was daily turning over, but only from the inferior authors and secondary historians, which he read only once. Most of the material collected in the commonplace book is used in his prose pamphlets. But when so employed the facts are worked into the texture of his argument, rather than cited as extraneous witnesses.

In reading history it was his aim to get at a conspectus of

the general current of affairs rather than to study minutely a special period. He tells Diodati in September, 1637, that he has studied Greek history continuously, from the beginning to the fall of Constantinople. When he tells the same friend that he has been long involved in the obscurity of the early middle ages of Italian History down to the time of the Emperor Rudolph, we learn from the commonplace book that he had only been reading the one volume of Sigonius's *Historia Regni Italici.* From the thirteenth century downwards he proposes to himself to study each Italian state in some separate history. Even before his journey to Italy he read Italian with as much ease as French. He tells us that it was by his father's advice that he had acquired these modern languages. But we can see that they were essential parts of his own scheme of self-education, which included, in another direction, Hebrew, both Biblical and Rabbinical, and even Syriac.

The intensity of his nature showed itself in his method of study. He read, not desultorily, a bit here and another there, but "when I take up with a thing, I never pause or break it off, nor am drawn away from it by any other interest, till I have arrived at the goal I proposed to myself." He made breaks occasionally in this routine of study by visits to London, to see friends, to buy books, to take lessons in mathematics, to go to the theatre, or to concerts. A love of music was inherited from his father.

I have called this period, 1632-39, one of preparation, and not of production. But though the first volume of poems printed by Milton did not appear till 1645, the most considerable part of its contents was written during the period included in the present chapter.

The fame of the author of *Paradise Lost* has over-

shadowed that of the author of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas*. Yet had *Paradise Lost* never been written, these three poems, with *Comus*, would have sufficed to place their author in a class apart, and above all those who had used the English language for poetical purposes before him. It is incumbent on Milton's biographer to relate the circumstances of the composition of *Comus*, as it is an incident in the life of the poet.

Milton's musical tastes had brought him the acquaintance of Henry Lawes, at that time the most celebrated composer in England. When the Earl of Bridgewater [illegible] Marches, it was to Lawes that application was made to furnish the music. Lawes, as naturally, applied to his young poetical acquaintance Milton, to write the words. The entertainment was to be of that sort which was fashionable at court, and was called a Mask. In that brilliant period of court life which was inaugurated by Elisabeth and put an end to by the Civil War, a Mask was a frequent and favourite amusement. It was an exhibition in which pageantry and music predominated, but in which dialogue was introduced as accompaniment or explanation.

The dramatic Mask of the sixteenth century has been traced by the antiquaries as far back as the time of Edward III. But in its perfected shape it was a genuine offspring of the English renaissance, a cross between the vernacular mummery, or mystery-play, and the Greek drama. No great court festival was considered complete without such a public show. Many of our great dramatic writers, Beaumont, Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Middleton, Dekker, Shirley, Carew, were constrained by the fashion

of the time to apply their invention to gratify this taste for decorative representation. No less an artist than Inigo Jones must occasionally stoop to construct the machinery.

The taste for grotesque pageant in the open air must have gradually died out before the general advance of refinement. The Mask by a process of evolution would have become the Opera. But it often happens that when a taste or fashion is at the point of death, it undergoes a forced and temporary revival. So it was with the Mask. In 1633, the Puritan hatred to the theatre had blazed out in Prynne's *Histriomastix*, and as a natural consequence, the loyal and cavalier portion of society threw itself into dramatic amusements of every kind. It was an unreal revival of the Mask, stimulated by political passion, in the wane of genuine taste for the fantastic and semi-barbarous pageant, in which the former age had delighted. What the imagination of the spectators was no longer equal to, was to be supplied by costliness of dress and scenery. These last representations of the expiring Mask were the occasions of an extravagant outlay. The Inns of Court and Whitehall vied with each other in the splendour and solemnity with which they brought out,—the Lawyers, Shirley's *Triumph of Peace*,—the Court, Carew's *Cœlum Britannicum*.

It was a strange caprice of fortune that made the future poet of the Puritan epic the last composer of a cavalier mask. The slight plot, or story, of *Comus* was probably suggested to Milton by his recollection of George Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, which he may have seen on the stage. The personage of *Comus* was borrowed from a Latin extravaganza by a Dutch professor, whose *Comus* was reprinted at Oxford in 1634, the very year in which

Milton wrote his *Mask*. The so-called tradition collected by Oldys, of the young Egertons, who acted in *Comus*, having lost themselves in Haywood Forest on their way to Ludlow, obviously grew out of Milton's poem. However casual the suggestion, or unpromising the occasion, Milton worked out of it a strain of poetry such as had never been heard in England before. If any reader wishes to realise the immense step upon what had gone before him, which was now made by a young man of twenty-seven, he should turn over some of the most celebrated of the masks of the Jacobean period.

We have no information how *Comus* was received when represented at Ludlow, but it found a public of readers. For Lawes, who had the MS. in his hands, was so importuned for copies that, in 1637, he caused an edition to be printed off. Not surreptitiously; for though Lawes does not say, in the dedication to Lord Brackley that he had the author's leave to print, we are sure that he had it, only from the motto. On the title page of this edition (1637), is the line,—

> Eheu! quid volui misero mihi! floribus austrum
> Perditus—

The words are Virgil's, but the appropriation of them, and their application in this "second intention" is too exquisite to have been made by any but Milton.

To the poems of the Horton period belong also the two pieces *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas*. He was probably in the early stage of acquiring the language, when he superscribed the two first poems with their Italian titles. *For there is no such word as "Penseroso,"* the adjective formed from "Pensiero" being "pensieroso." Even had the word been written correctly, its significa-

tion is not that which Milton intended, viz. thoughtful, or contemplative, but anxious, full of cares, carking. The rapid purification of Milton's taste will be best perceived by comparing *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* of uncertain date, but written after 1632, with the *Ode on the Nativity*, written 1629. The Ode, notwithstanding its foretaste of Milton's grandeur, abounds in frigid conceits, from which the two later pieces are free. The Ode is frosty, as written in winter, within the four walls of a college chamber. The two idylls breathe the free air of spring and summer, and of the fields round Horton. They are thoroughly naturalistic; the choicest expression our language has yet found of the fresh charm of country life, not as that life is lived by the peasant, but as it is felt by a young and lettered student, issuing at early dawn, or at sunset, into the fields from his chamber and his books. All rural sights and sounds and smells are here blended in that ineffable combination, which once or twice perhaps in our lives has saluted our young senses before their perceptions were blunted by alcohol, by lust, or ambition, or diluted by the social distractions of great cities.

The fidelity to nature of the imagery of these poems has been impugned by the critics.

> Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
> And at my window bid good morrow.

The skylark never approaches human habitations in this way, as the redbreast does. Mr. Masson replies that the subject of the verb "to come" is, not the skylark, but L'Allegro, the joyous student. I cannot construe the lines as Mr. Masson does, even though the consequence were to convict Milton, a city-bred youth, of not knowing a skylark from a sparrow when he saw it. A close observer of things around us would not speak of the

eglantine as twisted, of the cowslip as wan, of the violet as glowing, or of the reed as balmy. Lycidas' laureate hearse is to be strewn at once with primrose and woodbine, daffodil and jasmine. When we read "the rathe primrose that forsaken dies," we see that the poet is recollecting Shakespeare (Winter's Tale, 4. 4), not looking at the primrose. The pine is not "rooted deep as high" (*P. R.* 4416), but sends its roots along the surface. The elm, one of the thinnest foliaged trees of the forest, is inappropriately named starproof (*Arc.* 89). Lightning does not singe the tops of trees (*P. L.* 1. 613), but either shivers them, or cuts a groove down the stem to the ground. These and other such like inaccuracies must be set down partly to conventional language used without meaning, the vice of Latin versification enforced as a task, but they are partly due to real defect of natural knowledge.

Other objections of the critics on the same score, which may be met with, are easily dismissed. The objector, who can discover no reason why the oak should be styled "monumental," meets with his match in the defender who suggests, that it may be rightly so called because monuments in churches are made of oak. I should tremble to have to offer an explanation to critics of Milton so acute as these two. But of less ingenious readers I would ask, if any single word can be found equal to "monumental" in its power of suggesting to the imagination the historic oak of park or chase, up to the knees in fern, which has outlasted ten generations of men; has been the mute witness of the scenes of love, treachery, or violence enacted in the baronial hall which it shadows and protects; and has been so associated with man, that it is now rather a column and memorial obelisk than a tree of the forest!

These are the humours of criticism. But, apart from these, a naturalist is at once aware that Milton had neither the eye nor the ear of a naturalist. At no time, even before his loss of sight, was he an exact observer of natural objects. It may be that he knew a skylark from a redbreast, and did not confound the dog-rose with the honeysuckle. But I am sure that he had never acquired that interest in nature's things and ways, which leads to close and loving watching of them. He had not that sense of outdoor nature, empirical and not scientific, which endows the *Angler* of his cotemporary Walton, with its enduring charm, and which is to be acquired only by living in the open country in childhood. Milton is not a man of the fields, but of books. His life is in his study, and when he steps abroad into the air he carries his study thoughts with him. He does look at nature, but he sees her through books. Natural impressions are received from without, but always in those forms of beautiful speech, in which the poets of all ages have clothed them. His epithets are not, like the epithets of the school of Dryden and Pope, culled from the *Gradus ad Parnassum;* they are expressive of some reality, but it is of a real emotion in the spectator's soul, not of any quality detected by keen insight in the objects themselves. This emotion Milton's art stamps with an epithet, which shall convey the added charm of classical reminiscence. When, e.g., he speaks of "the wand'ring moon," the original significance of the epithet comes home to the scholarly reader with the enhanced effect of its association with the "errantem lunam" of Virgil. Nor because it is adopted from Virgil has the epithet here the second-hand effect of a copy. If Milton sees nature through books, he still sees it

To behold the wand'ring moon,
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray,
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,
And oft, as if her head she bow'd,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.

No allegation that "wand'ring moon" is borrowed from Horace can hide from us that Milton, though he remembered Horace, had watched the phenomenon with a feeling so intense that he projected his own soul's throb into the object before him, and named it with what Thomson calls "recollected love."

Milton's attitude towards nature is not that of a scientific naturalist, nor even that of a close observer. It is that of a poet who feels its total influence too powerfully to dissect it. If, as I have said, Milton reads books first and nature afterwards, it is not to test nature by his books, but to learn from both. He is learning not books, but from books. All he reads, sees, hears, is to him but nutriment for the soul. He is making himself. Man is to him the highest object; nature is subordinate to man, not only in its more vulgar uses, but as an excitant of fine emotion. He is not concerned to register the facts and phenomena of nature, but to convey the impressions they make on a sensitive soul. The external *forms* of things are to be presented to us as transformed through the heart and mind of the poet. The moon is endowed with life and will, "stooping," "riding," "wand'ring," "bowing her head," not as a frigid personification, and because the ancient poets so personified her, but by communication to her of the intense agitation which the nocturnal spectacle rouses in the poet's own breast.

I have sometimes read that these two idylls are "man-

terpieces of description." Other critics will ask if in the scenery of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* Milton has described the country about Horton, in Bucks, or that about Forest Hill, in Oxfordshire; and will object that the Chiltern Hills are not high enough for clouds to rest upon their top, much less upon their breast. But he has left out the pollard willows, says another censor, and the lines of pollard willow are the prominent feature in the valley of the Colne, even more so than the "hedgerow elms." Does the line "Walk the studious cloister's pale," *mean* St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey? When these things can continue to be asked, it is hardly superfluous to continue to repeat, that truth of fact and poetical truth are two different things. Milton's attitude towards nature is not that of a "descriptive poet," if indeed the phrase be not a self-contradiction.

In Milton, nature is not put forward as the poet's theme. His theme is man, in the two contrasted moods of joyous emotion, or grave reflection. The shifting scenery ministers to the varying mood. Thomson, in the *Seasons* (1726), sets himself to render natural phenomena as they truly are. He has left us a vivid presentation in gorgeous language of the naturalistic calendar of the changing year. Milton, in these two idylls, has recorded a day of twenty-four hours. But he has not registered the phenomena; he places us at the standpoint of the man before whom they deploy. And the man, joyous or melancholy, is not a bare spectator of them; he is the student, compounded of sensibility and intelligence, of whom we are not told that he saw so and so, or that he felt so, but with whom we are made copartners of his thoughts and feeling. Description melts into emotion, and contemplation bodies itself in imagery. All the

charm of rural life is there, but it is not tendered to us in the form of a landscape; the scenery is subordinated to the human figure in the centre.

These two short idylls are marked by a gladsome spontaneity which never came to Milton again. The delicate fancy and feeling which play about *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* never reappear, and form a strong contrast to the austere imaginings of his later poetical period. These two poems have the freedom and frolic, the natural grace of movement, the improvisation, of the best Elizabethan examples, while both thoughts and words are under a strict economy unknown to the diffuse exuberance of the Spenserians.

In *Lycidas* (1637) we have reached the high-water mark of English Poesy and of Milton's own production. A period of a century and a half was to elapse before poetry in England seemed, in Wordsworth's *Ode on Immortality* (1807), to be rising again towards the level of inspiration which it had once attained in *Lycidas*. And in the development of the Miltonic genius this wonderful dirge marks the culminating point. As the twin idylls of 1632 show a great advance upon the *Ode on the Nativity* (1629), the growth of the poetic mind during the five years which follow 1632 is registered in *Lycidas*. Like the *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas* is laid out on the lines of the accepted pastoral fiction; like them it offers exquisite touches of idealised rural life. But *Lycidas* opens up a deeper vein of feeling, a patriot passion so vehement and dangerous, that, like that which stirred the Hebrew prophet, it is compelled to veil itself from power, or from sympathy, in utterance made purposely enigmatical. The passage which begins "Last came and last did go," raises in us a thrill of

awe-struck expectation which I can only compare with that excited by the Cassandra of Æschylus's *Agamemnon.* For the reader to feel this, he must have present in memory the circumstances of England in 1637. He must place himself as far as possible in the situation of a cotemporary. The study of Milton's poetry compels the study of his time; and Professor Masson's six volumes are not too much to enable us to understand that there were real causes for the intense passion which glows underneath the poet's words—a passion which unexplained would be thought to be intrusive.

The historical exposition must be gathered from the English history of the period, which may be read in Professor Masson's excellent summary. All I desire to point out here is, that in *Lycidas*, Milton's original picturesque vein is for the first time crossed with one of quite another sort, stern, determined, obscurely indicative of suppressed passion, and the resolution to do or die. The fanaticism of the covenanter and the sad grace of Petrarch seem to meet in Milton's monody. Yet these opposites, instead of neutralising each other, are blended into one harmonious whole by the presiding, but invisible, genius of the poet. The conflict between the old cavalier world—the years of gaiety and festivity of a splendid and pleasure-loving court, and the new puritan world into which love and pleasure were not to enter—this conflict which was commencing in the social life of England, is also begun in Milton's own breast, and is reflected in *Lycidas*.

> For we were nurs'd upon the self-same hill.

Here is the sweet mournfulness of the Spenserian time, upon whose joys Death is the only intruder. Pass on-

ward a little, and you are in presence of the tremendous

Two-handed engine at the door,

the terror of which is enhanced by its obscurity. We are very sure that the avenger is there, though we know not who he is. In these thirty lines we have the preluding mutterings of the storm which was to sweep away mask and revel and song, to inhibit the drama, and suppress poetry. In the earlier poems Milton's muse has sung in the tones of the age that is passing away; the poet is, except in his austere chastity, a cavalier. Though even in *L'Allegro* Dr. Johnson truly detects "some melancholy in his mirth." In *Lycidas*, for a moment, the tones of both ages, the past and the coming, are combined, and then Milton leaves behind him for ever the golden age, and one half of his poetic genius. He never fulfilled the promise with which *Lycidas* concludes, "To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new."

CHAPTER III.

JOURNEY TO ITALY.

Before 1632 Milton had begun to learn Italian. His mind, just then open on all sides to impressions from books, was peculiarly attracted by Italian poetry. The language grew to be loved for its own sake. Saturated as he was with Dante and Petrarch, Tasso and Ariosto, the desire arose to let the ear drink in the music of Tuscan speech.

The "unhappy gift of beauty," which has attracted the spoiler of all ages to the Italian peninsula, has ever exerted, and still exerts, a magnetic force on every cultivated mind. Manifold are the sources of this fascination now. The scholar and the artist, the antiquarian and the historian, the architect and the lover of natural scenery, alike find here the amplest gratification of their tastes. This is so still; but in the sixteenth century the Italian cities were the only homes of an ancient and decaying civilization. Not insensible to other impressions, it was specially the desire of social converse with the living poets and men of taste—a feeble generation, but one still nourishing the traditions of the great poetic age—which drew Milton across the Alps.

In April, 1637, Milton's mother had died; but his

younger brother, Christopher, had come to live, with his wife, in the paternal home at Horton. Milton, the father, was not unwilling that his son should have his foreign tour, as a part of that elaborate education by which he was qualifying himself for his doubtful vocation. The cost was not to stand in the way, considerable as it must have been. Howell's estimate, in his *Instructions for Forreine Travel*, 1642, was 300*l.* a year for the tourist himself, and 50*l.* for his man, a sum equal to about 1000*l.* at present.

Among the letters of introduction with which Milton provided himself, one was from the aged Sir Henry Wotton, Provost of Eton, in Milton's immediate neighbourhood. Sir Henry, who had lived a long time in Italy, impressed upon his young friend the importance of discretion on the point of religion, and told him the story which he always told to travellers who asked his advice. "At Siena I was tabled in the house of one Alberto Scipioni, an old Roman courtier in dangerous times. . . . . At my departure for Rome I had won confidence enough to beg his advice how I might carry myself securely there, without offence of others, or of mine own conscience. 'Signor Arrigo mio,' says he, '*pensieri stretti ed il viso sciolto* (thoughts close, countenance open) will go safely over the whole world.'" Though the intensity of the Catholic reaction had somewhat relaxed in Italy, the deportment of a Protestant in the countries which were terrorised by the Inquisition was a matter which demanded much circumspection. Sir H. Wotton spoke from his own experience of far more rigorous times than those of the Barberini Pope. But he may have noticed, even in his brief acquaintance with Milton, a fearless presumption of speech which was just what was most likely to bring

him into trouble. The event proved that the hint was not misplaced. For at Rome itself, in the very lion's den, nothing could content the young zealot but to stand up for his Protestant creed. Milton would not do as Peter Heylin did, who, when asked as to his religion, replied that he was a Catholic, which, in a Laudian, was but a natural equivoque. Milton was resolute in his religion at Rome, so much so that many were deterred from showing him the civilities they were prepared to offer. His rule, he says, was "not of my own accord to introduce in those places conversation about religion, but, if interrogated respecting the faith, then, whatsoever I should suffer, to dissemble nothing. What I was, if any one asked, I concealed from no one; if any one in the very city of the Pope attacked the orthodox religion, I defended it most freely." Beyond the statement that the English Jesuits were indignant, we hear of no evil consequences of this imprudence. Perhaps the Jesuits saw that Milton was of the stuff that would welcome martyrdom, and were sick of the affair of Galileo, which had terribly damaged the pretensions of their church.

Milton arrived in Paris April or May, 1638. He received civilities from the English ambassador, Lord Scudamore, who at his request gave him an introduction to Grotius. Grotius, says Phillips, "took Milton's visit kindly, and gave him entertainment suitable to his worth, and the high commendations he had heard of him." We have no other record of his stay of many days in Paris, though A. Wood supposes that "the manners and graces of that place were not agreeable to his mind." It was August before he reached Florence, by way of Nice and Genoa, and in Florence he spent the two months which we now consider the most impossible there, the months

of August and September. Nor did he find, as he would find now, the city deserted by the natives. We hear nothing of Milton's impressions of the place, but of the men whom he met there he retained always a lively and affectionate remembrance. The learned and polite Florentines had not fled to the hills from the stifling heat and blinding glare of the Lung' Arno, but seem to have carried on their literary meetings in defiance of climate. This was the age of academies—an institution, Milton says, "of most praiseworthy effect, both for the cultivation of polite letters and the keeping up of friendships." Florence had five or six such societies, the Florentine, the Della Crusca, the Svogliati, the Apatisti, &c. It is easy, and usual in our day, to speak contemptuously of the literary tone of these academies, fostering, as they did, an amiable and garrulous intercourse of reciprocal compliment, and to contrast them unfavourably with our societies for severe research. They were at least evidence of culture, and served to keep alive the traditions of the more masculine Medicean age. And that the members of these associations were not unaware of their own degeneracy and of its cause, we learn from Milton himself. For as soon as they found that they were safe with the young Briton, they disclosed their own bitter hatred of the church's yoke which they had to bear. "I have sate among their learned men," Milton wrote in 1644, "and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning amongst them was brought, that this was it which had dampt the glory of Italian wits that nothing had been written there now these many years but flattery and fustian." Milton was introduced

at the meetings of their academies; his presence is recorded on two occasions, of which the latest is the 16th September at the Svogliati. He paid his scot by reciting from memory some of his youthful Latin verses, hexameters, "molto erudite," says the minute-book of the sitting, and others, which "I shifted, in the scarcity of books and conveniences, to patch up." He obtained much credit by these exercises, which, indeed, deserved it by comparison. He ventured upon the perilous experiment of offering some compositions in Italian, which the fastidious Tuscan ear at least professed to include in those "encomiums which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps."

The author of *Lycidas* cannot but have been quite aware of the small poetical merit of such an ode as that which was addressed to him by Francini. In this ode Milton is the swan of Thames—"Thames, which, owing to thee, rivals Bœotian Permessus;" and so forth. But there is a genuine feeling, an ungrudging warmth of sympathetic recognition underlying the trite and tumid panegyric. And Milton may have yielded to the not unnatural impulse of showing his countrymen, that though not a prophet in boorish and fanatical England, he had found recognition in the home of letters and arts. Upon us is forced, by this their different reception of Milton, the contrast between the two countries, Italy and England, in the middle of the seventeenth century. The rude north, whose civilisation was all to come, concentrating all its intelligence in a violent effort to work off the ecclesiastical poison from its system, is brought into sharp contrast with the sweet south, whose civilisation is behind it, and whose intellect, after a severe struggle, has succumbed to the material force and organisation of the church.

As soon as the season allowed of it, Milton set forward to Rome, taking what was then the usual way by Siena. At Rome he spent two months, occupying himself partly with seeing the antiquities, and partly with cultivating the acquaintance of natives, and some of the many foreigners resident in the eternal city. But though he received much civility, we do not find that he met with the peculiar sympathy which endeared to him his Tuscan friends. His chief ally was the German, Lucas Holstenius, a native of Hamburg, who had abjured Protestantism to become librarian of the Vatican. Holstenius had resided three years in Oxford, and considered himself bound to repay to the English scholar some of the attentions he had received himself. Through Holstenius Milton was presented to the nephew, Francesco Barberini, who was just then everything in Rome. It was at a concert at the Barberini palace that Milton heard Leonora Baroni sing. His three Latin epigrams addressed to this lady, the first singer of Italy, or of the world at that time, testify to the enthusiasm she excited in the musical soul of Milton.

Nor are these three epigrams the only homage which Milton paid to Italian beauty. The susceptible poet, who in the sunless north would fain have "sported with the tangles of Neæra's hair," could not behold Neæra herself and the flashing splendour of her eye, unmoved. Milton proclaims (*Defensio Secunda*) that in all his foreign tour he had lived clear from all that is disgraceful. But the pudicity of his behaviour and language covers a soul tremulous with emotion, whose passion was intensified by the discipline of a chaste intention. Five Italian pieces among his poems are to the address of another lady, whose "majestic movements and love-darting dark brow" had subdued him. The charm lay in the novelty of this style

of beauty to one who came from the land of the "vermeil-tinctur'd cheek" (*Comus*) and the "golden nets of hair" (*El.* i. 60). No clue has been discovered to the name of this divinity, or to the occasion on which Milton saw her.

Of Milton's impression of Rome there is no record. There are no traces of special observation in his poetry. The description of the city in *Paradise Regained* (iv. 32) has nothing characteristic, and could have been written by one who had never seen it, and by many as well as by Milton. We get one glimpse of him by aid of the register of the English College, as dining there at a "sumptuous entertainment" on 30th October, when he met Nicholas Carey, brother of Lord Falkland. In spite of Sir Henry Wotton's caution, his resoluteness, as A. Wood calls it, in his religion, besides making the English Jesuits indignant, caused others, not Jesuits, to withhold civilities. Milton only tells us himself that the antiquities detained him in Rome about two months.

At the end of November he went on to Naples. On the road he fell in with an Eremite friar, who gave him an introduction to the one man in Naples whom it was important he should know, Giovanni Battista Manso, Marquis of Villa. The marquis, now seventy-eight, had been for two generations the Mæcenas of letters in Southern Italy. He had sheltered Tasso in the former generation, and Marini in the latter. It was the singular privilege of his old age that he should now entertain a third poet, greater than either. In spite of his years, he was able to act as cicerone to the young Englishman over the scenes which he himself, in his *Life of Tasso*, has described with the enthusiasm of a poet. But even the high-souled Manso quailed before the terrors of the In-

quisition, and apologised to Milton for not having shown him greater attention, because he would not be more circumspect in the matter of religion. Milton's Italian journey brings out the two conflicting strains of feeling which were uttered together in *Lycidas*, the poet's impressibility by nature, the freeman's indignation at clerical domination.

The time was now at hand when the latter passion, the noble rage of freedom, was to suppress the more delicate flower of poetic imagination. Milton's original scheme had included Sicily and Greece. The serious aspect of affairs at home compelled him to renounce his project. "I considered it dishonourable to be enjoying myself at my ease in foreign lands, while my countrymen were striking a blow for freedom." He retraced his steps leisurely enough, however, making a halt of two months in Rome, and again one of two months in Florence. We find him mentioned in the minutes of the academy of the Svogliati as having been present at three of their weekly meetings, on the 17th, 24th, and 31st March. But the most noteworthy incident of his second Florentine residence is his interview with Galileo. He had been unable to see the veteran martyr of science on his first visit. For though Galileo was at that time living within the walls, he was kept a close prisoner by the Inquisition, and not allowed either to set foot outside his own door, or to receive visits from non-Catholics. In the spring of 1639, however, he was allowed to go back to his villa at Gioiello, near Arcetri, and Milton obtained admission to him, old, frail, and blind, but in full possession of his mental faculty. There is observable in Milton, as Mr. Masson suggests, a prophetic fascination of the fancy on the subject of blind

ness. And the deep impression left by this sight of "the Tuscan artist" is evidenced by the feeling with which Galileo's name and achievement are imbedded in *Paradise Lost*.

From Florence, Milton crossed the Apennines by Bologna and Ferrara to Venice. From this port he shipped for England the books he had collected during his tour, books curious and rare as they seemed to Phillips, and among them a chest or two of choice music books. The month of April was spent at Venice, and bidding farewell to the beloved land he would never visit again, Milton passed the Alps to Geneva.

No Englishman's foreign pilgrimage was complete without touching at this marvellous capital of the reformed faith, which with almost no resources had successfully braved the whole might of the Catholic reaction. The only record of Milton's stay at Geneva is the album of a Neapolitan refugee, to which Milton contributed his autograph, under date 10th June, 1639, with the following quotation:—

> If virtue feeble were,
> Heaven itself would stoop to her.
>
> (From *Comus*).
>
> Cœlum non animum muto, dum trans mare curro.
>
> (From *Horace*.)

But it is probable that he was a guest in the house of one of the leading pastors, Giovanni Diodati, whose nephew Charles, a physician commencing practice in London, was Milton's bosom friend. Here Milton first heard of the death, in the previous August, of that friend. It was a heavy blow to him, for one of the chief pleasures of being at home again would have been to pour

into a sympathetic Italian ear the story of his adventures. The sadness of the homeward journey from Geneva is recorded for us in the *Epitaphium Damonis*. This piece is an elegy to the memory of Charles Diodati. It unfortunately differs from the elegy on King in being written in Latin, and is thus inaccessible to uneducated readers. As to such readers the topic of Milton's Latin poetry is necessarily an ungrateful subject, I will dismiss it here with one remark. Milton's Latin verses are distinguished from most Neo-latin verse by being a vehicle of real emotion. His technical skill is said to have been surpassed by others; but that in which he stands alone is, that in these exercises of imitative art he is able to remain himself, and to give utterance to genuine passion. Artificial Arcadianism is as much the frame-work of the elegy on Diodati as it is of *Lycidas*. We have Daphnis and Bion, Tityrus and Amyntas for characters, Sicilian valleys for scenery, while Pan, Pales, and the Fauns represent the supernatural. The shepherds defend their flocks from wolves and lions. But this factitious bucolicism is pervaded by a pathos, which, like volcanic heat, has fused into a new compound the dilapidated débris of the Theocritean world. And in the Latin elegy there is more tenderness than in the English. Charles Diodati was much nearer to Milton than had been Edward King. The sorrow in *Lycidas* is not so much personal as it is the regret of the society of Christ's. King had only been known to Milton as one of the students of the same college; Diodati was the associate of his choice in riper manhood.

The *Epitaphium Damonis* is further memorable as Milton's last attempt in serious Latin verse. He discovered in this experiment that Latin was not an adequate

vehicle of the feeling he desired to give vent to. In the concluding lines he takes a formal farewell of the Latian muse, and announces his purpose of adopting henceforth the "harsh and grating Brittonic idiom" (*Brittonicum stridens*).

SECOND PERIOD. 1640—1660.

CHAPTER IV.

EDUCATIONAL THEORY—TEACHING

MILTON was back in England in August, 1639. He had been absent a year and three months, during which space of time the aspect of public affairs, which had been perplexed and gloomy when he left, had been growing still more ominous of a coming storm. The issues of the controversy were so pervasive, that it was almost impossible for any educated man who understood them not to range himself on a side. Yet Milton, though he had broken off his projected tour in consequence, did not rush into the fray on his return. He resumed his retired and studious life, "with no small delight, cheerfully leaving," as he says, "the event of public affairs first to God, and then to those to whom the people had committed that task."

He did not return to Horton, but took lodgings in London, in the house of Russel a tailor, in St. Bride's churchyard, at the city end of Fleet-street, on the site of what is now Farringdon-street. There is no attempt on the part of Milton to take up a profession, not even for the sake of appearances. The elder Milton was content to provide the son, of whom he was proud, with the means of prosecuting his eccentric scheme of life, to continue,

namely, to prepare himself for some great work, nature unknown.

For a young man of simple habits and studious life a little suffices. The chief want is books, and of these, for Milton's style of reading, select rather than copious, a large collection is superfluous. There were in 1640 no public libraries in London, and a scholar had to find his own store of books or to borrow from his friends. Milton never can have possessed a large library. At Horton he may have used Kederminster's bequest to Langley Church. Still, with his Italian acquisitions, added to the books that he already possessed, he soon found a lodging too narrow for his accommodation, and removed to a house of his own, "a pretty garden-house, in Aldersgate, at the end of an entry." Aldersgate was outside the city walls, on the verge of the open country of Islington, and was a genteel though not a fashionable quarter. There were few streets in London, says Phillips, more free from noise.

He had taken in hand the education of his two nephews, John and Edward Phillips, sons of his only sister Anne. Anne was a few years older than her brother John. Her first husband, Edward Phillips, had died in 1631, and the widow had given her two sons a stepfather in one Thomas Agar, who was in the Clerk of the Crown's office. Milton, on settling in London in 1639, had at once taken his younger nephew John to live with him. When, in 1640, he removed to Aldersgate, the elder, Edward, also came under his roof.

If it was affection for his sister which first moved Milton to undertake the tuition of her sons, he soon developed a taste for the occupation. In 1643 he began to receive into his house other pupils, but only, says Phillips (who is solicitous that his uncle should not be

thought to have kept a school), "the sons of some gentlemen that were his intimate friends." He threw into his lessons the same energy which he carried into everything else. In his eagerness to find a place for everything that could be learnt, there could have been few hours in the day which were not invaded by teaching. He had exchanged the contemplative leisure of Horton for a busy life, in which no hour but had its calls. Even on Sundays there were lessons in the Greek Testament and dictations of a system of Divinity in Latin. His pamphlets of this period betray, in their want of measure and equilibrium, even in their heated style and passion-flushed language, the life at high pressure which their author was leading.

We have no account of Milton's method of teaching from any competent pupil Edward Phillips was an amiable and upright man, who earned his living respectably by tuition and the compilation of books. He held his uncle's memory in great veneration. But when he comes to describe the education he received at his uncle's hands, the only characteristic on which he dwells is that of quantity. Phillips's account is, however, supplemented for us by Milton's written theory. His *Tractate of Education to Master Samuel Hartlib* is probably known even to those who have never looked at anything else of Milton's in prose.

Of all the practical arts, that of education seems the most cumbrous in its method, and to be productive of the smallest results with the most lavish expenditure of means. Hence the subject of education is one which is always luring on the innovator and the theorist. Every one, as he grows up, becomes aware of time lost, and effort misapplied, in his own case It is not unnatural to desire to save our children from a like waste of power. And in a

time such as was that of Milton's youth, when all traditions were being questioned, and all institutions were to be remodelled, it was certain that the school would be among the earliest objects to attract an experimental reformer. Among the advanced minds of the time there had grown up a deep dissatisfaction with the received methods of our schools, and more especially of our universities. The great instaurator of all knowledge, Bacon, in preaching the necessity of altering the whole method of knowing, included as matter of course the method of teaching to know.

The man who carried over the Baconian aspiration into education was Comenius (d. 1670). A projector and enthusiast, Comenius desired, like Bacon, an entirely new intellectual era. With Bacon's intellectual ambition, but without Bacon's capacity, Comenius proposed to revolutionise all knowledge, and to make complete wisdom accessible to all, in a brief space of time, and with a minimum of labour. Language only as an instrument, not as an end in itself; many living languages, instead of the one dead language of the old school; a knowledge of things, instead of words; the free use of our eyes and ears upon the nature that surrounds us; intelligent apprehension, instead of loading the memory—all these doctrines, afterwards inherited by the party of rational reform, were first promulgated in Europe by the numerous pamphlets—some ninety have been reckoned up—of this Teuto-Slav, Comenius.

Comenius had as the champion of his views in England Samuel Hartlib, a Dantziger by origin, settled in London since 1628. Hartlib had even less of real science than Comenius, but he was equally possessed by the Baconian ideal of a new heaven and a new earth of knowledge.

Not himself a discoverer in any branch, he was unceasingly occupied in communicating the discoveries and inventions of others He had an ear for every novelty of whatever kind, interesting himself in social, religious, philanthropic schemes, as well as in experiments in the arts. A sanguine universality of benevolence pervaded that generation of ardent souls, akin only in their common anticipation of an unknown Utopia. A secret was within the reach of human ingenuity which would make all mankind happy. But there were two directions more especially in which Hartlib's zeal without knowledge abounded. These were a grand scheme for the union of Protestant Christendom, and his propagand of Comenius's school-reform.

For the first of these projects it was not likely that Hartlib would gain a proselyte in Milton, who had at one-and-twenty judged Anglican orders a servitude, and was already chafing against the restraints of Presbytery. But on his other hobby, that of school-reform, Milton was not only sympathetic, but when Hartlib came to talk with him, he found that most or all of Comenius's ideas had already independently presented themselves to the reflection or experience of the Englishman. At Hartlib's request Milton consented to put down his thoughts on paper, and even to print them in a quarto pamphlet of eight pages, entitled, *Of Education: to Master Samuel Hartlib.*

This tract, often reproduced and regarded, along with one of Locke's, as a substantial contribution to the subject, must often have grievously disappointed those who have eagerly consulted it for practical hints or guidance of any kind. Its interest is wholly biographical. It cannot be regarded as a valuable contribution to educational theory, but it is strongly marked with the Miltonic indi-

viduality. We find in it the same lofty conception of the aim which Milton carried into everything he attempted; the same disdain of the beaten routine, and proud reliance upon his own resources. He had given vent elsewhere to his discontent with the system of Cambridge, "which, as in the time of her better health, and mine own younger judgment, I never greatly admired, so now (1642) much less." In the letter to Hartlib he denounces with equal fierceness the schools and "the many mistakes which have made learning generally so unpleasing and so unsuccessful." The alumni of the universities carry away with them a hatred and contempt for learning, and sink into "ignorantly zealous" clergymen, or mercenary lawyers, while the men of fortune betake themselves to feasts and jollity. These last, Milton thinks, are the best of the three classes.

All these moral shipwrecks are the consequence, according to Milton, of bad education. It is in our power to avert them by a reform of schools. But the measures of reform, when produced, are ludicrously incommensurable with the evils to be remedied. I do not trouble the reader with the proposals; they are a form of the well-known mistake of regarding education as merely the communication of useful knowledge. The doctrine as propounded in the *Tractate* is complicated by the further difficulty, that the knowledge is to be gathered out of Greek and Latin books. This doctrine is advocated by Milton with the ardour of his own lofty enthusiasm. In virtue of the grandeur of zeal which inspires them, these pages, which are in substance nothing more than the now familiar omniscient examiner's programme, retain a place as one of our classics. The fine definition of education here given has never been improved upon: "I call a

complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." This is the true Milton. When he offers, in another page, as an *equivalent definition of the true* end *of learning,* "to repair the ruin of our first parents by regaining to know God aright," we have the theological Milton, and what he took on from the current language of his age.

Milton saw strongly, as many have done before and since, one weak point in the practice of schools, namely, the small result of much time. He fell into the natural error of the inexperienced teacher, *that of supposing that* the remedy was the *ingestion of much and diversified* intelligible matter. It requires much observation of young minds to discover that the rapid inculcation of unassimilated information stupefies the faculties instead of training them. Is it fanciful to think that in Edward *Phillips, who was always employing his superficial* pen upon topics with which he snatched a fugitive acquaintance, we have a concrete example of the natural result of the Miltonic system of instruction?

CHAPTER V.

MARRIAGE, AND PAMPHLETS ON DIVORCE.

We have seen that Milton turned back from his unaccomplished tour because he "deemed it disgraceful to be idling away his time abroad for his own gratification, while his countrymen were contending for their liberty." From these words biographers have inferred that he hurried home with the view of taking service in the Parliamentarian army. This interpretation of his words seems to receive confirmation from what Phillips thinks he had heard,—"I am much mistaken if there were not about this time a design in agitation of making him Adjutant-General in Sir William Waller's army." Phillips very likely thought that a recruit could enlist as an Adjutant-General, but it does not appear from Milton's own words that he himself ever contemplated service in the field. The words "contending for liberty" (de libertate dimicarent) could not, as said of the winter 1638-39, mean anything more than the strife of party. And when war did break out, it must have been obvious to Milton that he could serve the cause better as a scholar than as a soldier.

That he never took service in the army is certain. If

there was a time when he should have been found in ranks, it was on the 12th November, 1642, when eve able-bodied citizen turned out to oppose the march of th king, who had advanced to Brentford. But we have th evidence of the sonnet—

Captain, or Colonel, or Knight in arms,

that Milton, on this occasion, stayed at home. He had, as he announced in February, 1642, "taken labour and intent study" to be his portion in this life. He did not contemplate enlisting his pen in the service of the Parliament, but the exaltation of his country's glory by the composition of some monument of the English language, as Dante or Tasso had done for Italian. But a project ambitious as this lay too far off to be put in execution as soon as thought of. The ultimate purpose had to give place to the immediate. One of these interludes, originating in Milton's personal relations, was his series of tracts on divorce.

In the early part of the summer of 1643, Milton took sudden journey into the country, "nobody about him rtainly knowing the reason, or that it was any more an a journey of recreation." He was absent about a nth, and when he returned he brought back a wife h him. Nor was the bride alone. She was attended some few of her nearest relations," and there was cing and celebration of the nuptials, in the house in rsgate-street.

e bride's name was Mary, eldest daughter of Richard ll, Esq., of Forest Hill, J.P. for the county of Oxford. Hill is a village and parish about five miles from l on the Thame road, where Mr. Powell had a house

and a small estate of some 300*l.* a year, value of that day. Forest Hill was within the ancient royal forest of Shotover, of which Mr. Powell was lessee. The reader will remember that the poet's father was born at Stanton St. John, the adjoining parish to Forest Hill, and that Richard Milton, the grandfather, had been under-ranger of the royal forest. There had been many transactions between the Milton and the Powell families as far back as 1627. In paying a visit to that neighbourhood, Milton was both returning to the district which had been the home of all the Miltons, and renewing an old acquaintance with the Powell family. Mr. Powell, though in receipt of a fair income for a country gentleman—300*l.* a year of that day may be roughly valued at 1000*l.* of our day—and his wife had brought him 3000*l.*, could not live within his means. His children were numerous, and, belonging as he did to the cavalier party, his house was conducted with the careless hospitality of a royalist gentleman. Twenty years before he had begun borrowing, and among other persons had had recourse to the prosperous and saving scrivener of Bread-street. He was already mortgaged to the Miltons, father and sons, more deeply than his estate had any prospect of paying, which was perhaps the reason why he found no difficulty in promising a portion of 1000*l.* with his daughter. Milton, with a poet's want of caution, or indifference to money, and with a lofty masculine disregard of the temper and character of the girl he asked to share his life, came home with his bride in triumph, and held feasting in celebration of his hasty and ill considered choice. It was a beginning of sorrows to him. Hitherto, up to his thirty-fifth year, independent master of leisure and the delights of literature, his years had passed without a check or a shadow. From this day

forward domestic misery, the importunities of business, the clamour of controversy, crowned by the crushing calamity of blindness, were to be his portion for more than thirty years. Singular among poets in the serene fortune of the first half of life, in the second half his piteous fate was to rank in wretchedness with that of his masters, Dante or Tasso.

The biographer, acquainted with the event, has no difficulty in predicting it, and in saying at this point in his story, that Milton might have known better than, with his puritanical connections, to have taken to wife a daughter of a cavalier house, to have brought her from a roystering home, frequented by the dissolute officers of the Oxford garrison, to the spare diet and philosophical retirement of a recluse student, and to have looked for sympathy and response for his speculations from an uneducated and frivolous girl. Love has blinded, and will continue to blind, the wisest men to calculations as easy and as certain as these. And Milton, in whose soul Puritan austerity was as yet only contending with the more genial currents of humanity, had a far greater than average susceptibility to the charm of woman. Even at the later date of *Paradise Lost*, voluptuous thoughts, as Mr. Hallam has observed, are not uncongenial to him. And at an earlier age his poems, candidly pure from the lascivious inuendoes of his contemporaries, have preserved the record of the rapid impression of the momentary passage of beauty upon his susceptible mind. Once, at twenty, he was set all on flame by the casual meeting in one of his walks in the suburbs of London, with a damsel whom he never saw again. Again, sonnets III to V. tell how he fell before the new type of foreign beauty which crossed his path at Bologna. A similar

surprise of his fancy at the expense of his judgment seems to have happened on the present occasion of his visit to Shotover. There is no evidence that Mary Powell was handsome, and we may be sure that it would have been mentioned if she had been. But she had youth, and country freshness; her "unliveliness and natural sloth unfit for conversation" passed as "the bashful muteness of a virgin;" and if a doubt intruded that he was being too hasty, Milton may have thought that a girl of seventeen could be moulded at pleasure.

He was too soon undeceived. His dream of married happiness barely lasted out the honeymoon. He found that he had mated himself to a clod of earth, who not only was not now, but had not the capacity of becoming, a helpmeet for him. With Milton, as with the whole Calvinistic and Puritan Europe, woman was a creature of an inferior and subordinate class. Man was the final cause of God's creation, and woman was there to minister to this nobler being. In his dogmatic treatise, *De doctrina Christiana*, Milton formulated this sentiment in the thesis, borrowed from the schoolmen, that the soul was communicated "in semine patris." The cavalier section of society had inherited the sentiment of chivalry, and contrasted with the roundhead not more by its loyalty to the person of the prince, than by its recognition of the superior grace and refinement of womanhood. Even in the debased and degenerate epoch of court life which followed 1660, the forms and language of homage still preserved the tradition of a nobler scheme of manners. The Puritan had thrown off chivalry as being parcel of Catholicism, and had replaced it by the Hebrew ideal of the subjection and seclusion of woman. Milton, in whose mind the rigidity of Puritan doctrine was now contending

with the freer spirit of culture and romance, shows the present occasion a like conflict of doctrine wi sentiment. While he adopts the oriental hypothesis woman for the sake of man, he modifies it by layin more stress upon mutual affection, the charities of home and the intercommunion of intellectual and moral life, than upon that ministration of woman to the appetite and comforts of man, which makes up the whole of her functions in the Puritan apprehension. The failure in his own case to obtain this genial companionship of soul, which he calls "the gentlest end of marriage," is what gave the keenest edge to his disappointment in his matrimonial venture.

But however keenly he felt and regretted the precipitancy which had yoked him for life to "a mute and spiritless mate," the breach did not come from his side. The girl herself conceived an equal repugnance to the husband she had thoughtlessly accepted, probably on the trength of his good looks, which was all of Milton that he was capable of appreciating. A young bride, taken ddenly from the freedom of a jovial and an undiscined home, rendered more lax by civil confusion and easy ercourse with the officers of the royalist garrison, and mitted to the sole society of a stranger, and that nger possessing the rights of a husband, and expecting h from all who lived with him, may not unnaturally been seized with panic terror, and wished herself again. The young Mrs. Milton not only wished it, cited her family to write and beg that she might be d to go home to stay the remainder of the summer. equest to quit her husband at the end of the first was so unreasonable, that the parents would have made it if they had not suspected some pro-

found cause of estrangement. Nor could Milton have consented, as he did, to so extreme a remedy, unless he had felt that the case required no less, and that her mother's advice and influence were the most available means of awakening his wife to a sense of her duty. Milton's consent was therefore given. He may have thought it desirable she should go, and thus Mrs. Powell would not have been going very much beyond the truth when she pretended some years afterwards that her son-in-law had turned away his wife for a long space.

Mary Milton went to Forest Hill in July, but on the understanding that she was to come back at Michaelmas. When the appointed time came, she did not appear. Milton wrote for her to come. No answer. Several other letters met the same fate. At last he despatched a foot messenger to Forest Hill desiring her return. The messenger came back only to report that he had been "dismissed with some sort of contempt." It was evident that Mary Milton's family had espoused her cause as against her husband. Whatever may have been the secret motive of their conduct, they explained the quarrel politically, and began to repent, so Phillips thought, of having matched the eldest daughter of their house with a violent Presbyterian.

If Milton had "hasted too eagerly to light the nuptial torch," he had been equally ardent in his calculations of the domestic happiness upon which he was to enter. His poet's imagination had invested a dull and common girl with rare attributes moral and intellectual, and had pictured for him the state of matrimony as an earthly paradise, in which he was to be secure of a response of affection showing itself in a communion of intelligent interests. In proportion to the brilliancy of his ideal anticipation

was the fury of despair which came upon him when found out his mistake. A common man, in a comm age, would have vented his vexation upon the individu Milton, living at a time when controversy turned aw from details, and sought to dig down to the roots of eve question, instead of urging the hardships of his own cas set to to consider the institution of marriage in itself. H published a pamphlet with the title, *The Doctrine an Discipline of Divorce*, at first anonymously, but putting his name to a second edition, much enlarged. He further reinforced this argument in chief with three supplementary pamphlets, partly in answer to opponents and objectors, for there was no lack of opposition, indeed of outcry loud and fierce.

A biographer closely scans the pages of these pam phlets, not for the sake of their direct argument, but to see if he can extract from them any indirect hints of their author's personal relations. There is found in them no mention of Milton's individual case. Had we no other information, we should not be authorised to infer from them that the question of the marriage tie was more than an abstract question with the author.

But though all mention of his own case is studiously voided by Milton, his pamphlet, when read by the light Phillips's brief narrative, does seem to give some assis nce in apprehending the circumstances of this obscure ssage of the poet's life. The mystery has always been by the biographers, but has assumed a darker hue e the discovery by Mr. Masson of a copy of the first ion of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, with ritten date of August 1. According to Phillips's ative, the pamphlet was engendered by Milton's nation at his wife's contemptuous treat

plead the common cause of man and of society. He gives no intimation of any individual interest, but his argument throughout glows with a white heat of concealed emotion, such as could only be stirred by the sting of some personal and present misery.

Notwithstanding the amount of free opinion abroad in England, or at least in London, at this date, Milton's divorce pamphlets created a sensation of that sort which Gibbon is fond of calling a scandal. A scandal, in this sense, must always arise in your own party; you cannot scandalise the enemy. And so it was now. The Episcopalians were rejoiced that Milton should ruin his credit with his own side by advocating a paradox. The Presbyterians hastened to disown a man who enabled their opponents to brand their religious scheme as the parent of moral heresies. For though church government and the English constitution in all its parts had begun to be open questions, speculation had not as yet attacked either of the two bases of society, property or the family. Loud was the outcry of the Philistines. There was no doubt that the rigid bonds of Presbyterian orthodoxy would not in any case have long held Milton. They were snapped at once by the publication of his opinions on divorce, and Milton is henceforward to be ranked among the most independent of the new party which shortly after this date began to be heard of under the name of Independents.

But the men who formed the nucleus of this new mode of thinking were as yet, in 1643, not consolidated into a sect, still less was their importance as the coming political party dreamt of. At present they were units, only drawn to each other by the sympathy of opinion. The contemptuous epithets, *Anabaptist*, *Antinomian*, &c., could be

levelled against them with fatal effect by every Philistine, and were freely used on this occasion against Milton. He says of himself that he now lived in a world of disesteem. Nor was there wanting, to complete his discomfiture, the practical parody of the doctrine of divorce. A Mistress Attaway, lacewoman in Bell-alley, and she-preacher in Coleman-street, had been reading Master Milton's book, and remembered that she had an unsanctified husband, who did not speak the language of Canaan. She further reflected that Mr. Attaway was not only unsanctified, but was also absent with the army, while William Jenney was on the spot, and, like herself, also a preacher. Could a "scandalised" Presbyterian help pointing the finger of triumphant scorn at such examples, the natural fruits of that mischievous book, *The Doctrine and Discipline?*

Beyond the stage of scandal and disesteem the matter did not proceed. In dedicating *The Doctrine and Discipline* to the Parliament, Milton had specially called on that assembly to legislate for the relief of men who were encumbered with unsuitable spouses. No notice was taken of this appeal, as there was far other work on hand, and no particular pressure from without in the direction of Milton's suit. Divorce for incompatibility of temper remained his private crotchet, or obtained converts only among his fellow-sufferers, who, however numerous, did not form a body important enough to enforce by clamour their demand for relief.

Milton was not very well pleased to find that the Parliament had no ear for the bitter cry of distress wrung from their ardent admirer and staunch adherent. Accordingly, in 1645, in dedicating the last of the divorce pamphlets, which he entitled *Tetrachordon*, to the Parliament

he concluded with a threat, "If the law make not a timely provision, let the law, as reason is, bear the censure of the consequences."

This threat he was prepared to put in execution, and did, in 1645, as Phillips tells us, contemplate a union, which could not have been a marriage, with another woman. He was able at this time to find some part of that solace of conversation which his wife failed to give him, among his female acquaintance. Especially we find him at home in the house of one of the Parliamentary women, the Lady Margaret Ley, a lady "of great wit and ingenuity," the "honoured Margaret" of Sonnet x. But the Lady Margaret was a married woman, being the wife of a Captain Hobson, a "very accomplished gentleman," of the Isle of Wight. The young lady who was the object of his attentions, and who, if she were the "virtuous young lady" of Sonnet IX., was "in the prime of earliest youth," was a daughter of a Dr. Davis, of whom nothing else is now known. She is described by Phillips, who may have seen her, as a very handsome and witty gentlewoman. Though Milton was ready to brave public opinion, Miss Davis was not. And so the suit hung, when all schemes of the kind were put an end to by the unexpected submission of Mary Powell.

Since October, 1643, when Milton's messenger had been dismissed from Forest Hill, the face of the civil struggle was changed. The Presbyterian army had been replaced by that of the Independents, and the immediate consequence had been the decline of the royal cause, consummated by its total ruin on the day of Naseby, in June, 1645. Oxford was closely invested, Forest Hill occupied by the besiegers, and the Powell family compelled to take refuge within the lines of the city. Financial bankruptcy, too

had overtaken the Powells. These influences, rather than any rumours which may have reached them of Milton's designs in regard to Miss Davis, wrought a change in the views of the Powell family. By the triumph of the Independents Mr. Milton was become a man of consideration, and might be useful as a protector. They concluded that the best thing they could do was to seek a reconciliation. There were not wanting friends of Milton's also, some perhaps divining his secret discontent, who thought that such reconciliation would be better for him too, than perilling his happiness upon the experiment of an illegal connexion. A conspiracy of the friends of both parties contrived to introduce Mary Powell into a house where Milton often visited in St. Martin's-le-Grand. She was secreted in an adjoining room, on an occasion when Milton was known to be coming, and he was surprised by seeing her suddenly brought in, throw herself on her knees, and ask to be forgiven. The poor young thing, now two years older and wiser, but still only nineteen, pleaded, truly or falsely, that her mother "had been all along the chief promoter of her frowardness." Milton, with a "noble leonine clemency" which became him, cared not for excuses for the past. It was enough that she was come back, and was willing to live with him

. . . Eve, with tears that ceas'd not flowing
And tresses all disorder'd, at his feet
Fell humble, and embracing them, besought
His peace .
. . . Her lowly plight
Immovable, till peace obtain'd from fault
Acknowledg'd and deplor'd, in Adam wrought
Commiseration; soon his heart relented
Tow'rds her, his life so late and sole delight,
Now at his feet submissive in distress!
Creature so fair his reconcilement seeking,
* * * * *
At once disarm'd, his anger all he lost.

The garden-house in Aldersgate-street had before been found too small for the pupils who were being now pressed upon Milton. It was to a larger house in Barbican, a side street leading out of Aldersgate, that he brought the Powells and Mary Milton. Milton probably abated his exactions on the point of companionship, and learned to be content with her acquiescence in the duties of a wife. In July, 1646, she became a mother, and bore in all four children. Of these, three, all daughters, lived to grow up. Mary Milton herself died in giving birth to the fourth child in the summer of 1652. She was only twenty-six, and had been married to Milton nine years.

CHAPTER VI.

PAMPHLETS.

We have now seen Milton engaged in teaching and writing on education, involved in domestic unhappiness, and speculating on the obligations of marriage. But neither of these topics formed the principal occupation of his mind during these years. He had renounced a cherished scheme of travel because his countrymen were engaged at home in contending for their liberties, and it could not but be that the gradually intensified stages of that struggle engrossed his interest, and claimed his participation.

So imperative did he regard this claim that he allowed it to override the purposed dedication of his life to poetry. Not indeed for ever and aye, but for a time. As he had renounced Greece, the Ægean Isles, Thebes, and the East for the fight for freedom, so now to the same cause he postponed the composition of his epic of Arthurian romance, or whatever his mind "in the spacious circuits of her musing proposed to herself of highest hope and hardest attempting." No doubt at first, in thus deferring the work of his life, he thought the delay would be for a brief space. He did not foresee that having once taken an oar, he would be chained to it for more than twenty

years, and that he would finally owe his release to the ruin of the cause he had served. But for the Restoration and the overthrow of the Puritans, we should never have had the great Puritan epic.

The period then of his political activity is to be regarded as an episode in the life of the poet Milton. It is indeed an episode which fills twenty years, and those the most vigorous years of manhood, from his thirty-second to his fifty-second year. He himself was conscious of the sacrifice he was making, and apologises to the public for thus defrauding them of the better work which he stood pledged to execute. As he puts it, there was no choice for him. He could not help himself, at this critical juncture, "when the Church of God was at the foot of her insulting enemies;" he would never have ceased to reproach himself, if he had refused to employ the fruits of his studies in her behalf. He saw also that a generation inflamed by the passions of conflict, and looking in breathless suspense for the issue of battles, was not in a mood to attend to poetry. Nor, indeed, was he ready to write, "not having yet (this is in 1642) completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies."

But though he is drawn into the strife against his will, and in defiance of his genius, when he is in it, he throws into it the whole vehemence of his nature. The pamphlet period, I have said, is an episode in the life of the poet. But it is a genuine part of Milton's life. However his ambition may have been set upon an epic crown, his zeal for what he calls the church was an equal passion, nay had, in his judgment, a paramount claim upon him. He is a zealot among the zealots; his cause is the cause of God; and the sword of the Independents is the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. He does not refute

opponents, but curses enemies. Yet his rage, even when most delirious, is always a Miltonic rage; it is grand, sublime, terrible! Mingled with the scurrilities of the theological brawl are passages of the noblest English ever written. Hartley Coleridge explains the dulness of the wit-combats in Shakspeare and Jonson, on the ground that repartee is the accomplishment of lighter thinkers and a less earnest age. So of Milton's pamphlets it must be said that he was not fencing for pastime, but fighting for all he held most worthy. He had to think only of making his blows tell. When a battle is raging, and my friends are sorely pressed, am I not to help because good manners forbid the shedding of blood?

No good man can, with impunity, addict himself to party. And the best men will suffer most, because their conviction of the goodness of their cause is deeper. But when one with the sensibility of a poet throws himself into the excitements of a struggle, he is certain to lose his balance. The endowment of feeling and imagination which qualifies him to be the ideal interpreter of life, unfits him for participation in that real life, through the manœuvres and compromises of which reason is the only guide, and where imagination is as much misplaced as it would be in a game of chess. "The ennobling difference between one man and another is that one feels more than another." Milton's capacity of emotion, when once he became champion of a cause, could not be contained within the bounds of ordinary speech. It breaks into ferocious reprobation, into terrific blasts of vituperation, beneath which the very language creaks, as the timbers of a ship in a storm. Corruptio optimi pessima. The archangel is recognisable by the energy of his malice. Were all those accomplishments, those many studious

s hiving wisdom, the knowledge of all the tongues, command of all the thoughts of all the ages, and that lth of English expression—were all these acquirements y of use, that their possessor might vie in defamation h an Edwards or a Du Moulin?

For it should be noted that these pamphlets, now only rving as a record of the prostitution of genius to political rty, were, at the time at which they appeared, of no use the cause in which they were written. Writers, with professional tendency to magnify their office, have always een given to exaggerate the effect of printed words. There are examples of thought having been influenced by books. But such books have been scientific, not rhetorical. Milton's pamphlets are not works of speculation, or philosophy, or learning, or solid reasoning on facts. They are inflammatory appeals, addressed to the passions of the hour. He who was meditating the erection of an enduring creation, such as the world "would not willingly let die," was content to occupy himself with the most ephemeral of all hackwork. His own polemical writings may be justly described in the words he himself uses of a book by one of his opponents, as calculated "to gain a short, contemptible, and soon-fading reward, not to stir the constancy and solid firmness of any wise man . . . . but to catch the worthless approbation of an inconstant, irrational, and image-doting rabble."

It would have been not unnatural that the public school and university man, the admirer of Shakespeare and the old romances, the pet of Italian academies, the poet-scholar, himself the author of two Masks, who was nursing his wings for a new flight into the realms of verse, should have sided with the cavaliers against the Puritans, with the party of culture and the humanitie

against the party which shut up the theatres and despised profane learning. But we have seen that there was another side to Milton's mind. This may be spoken of as his other self, the Puritan self, and regarded as in internal conflict with the poet's self. His twenty years' pamphlet warfare may be presented by his biographer as the expression of the Puritanic Milton, who shall have been driven back upon his suppressed instincts as a poet by the ruin of his political hopes. This chart of Milton's life is at once simple and true. But like all physiological diagrams it falls short of the subtlety and complexity of human character. A study of the pamphlets will show that the poet is all there, indeed only too openly for influence on opinion, and that the blighted hope of the patriot lends a secret pathos to *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes.*

This other element in Milton is not accurately named Puritanism. Even the term republicanism is a coarse and conventional description of that sentiment which dominated his whole being, and which is the inspiration at once of his poetry and of his prose. To give a name to this sentiment, I must call it the love of liberty. It was an aspiration at once real and vague, after a new order of things, an order in which the old injustices and oppressions should cease; after a new Jerusalem, a millennium, a Utopia, an Oceana. Its aim was to realise in political institutions that great instauration of which Bacon dreamed in the world of intelligence. It was much more negative than affirmative, and knew better, as we all do, how good was hindered than how it should be promoted. "I did but prompt the age to *quit their clogs.*" Milton embodied, more perfectly than any of his cotemporaries, this spirit of the age. It is the ardent aspiration after the pure and noble life, the aspiration which stamps every line he

wrote, verse or prose, with a dignity as of an heroic age. This gives consistency to all his utterances. The doctrinaire republican of to-day cannot understand how the man who approved the execution of the would-be despot Charles Stuart, should have been the hearty supporter of the real autocrat Oliver Cromwell. Milton was not the slave of a name. He cared not for the word republic, so as it was well with the commonwealth. Parliaments or single rulers, he knew, are but means to an end; if that end was obtained, no matter if the constitutional guarantees exist or not. Many of Milton's pamphlets are certainly party pleadings, choleric, one-sided, personal. But through them all runs the one redeeming charac teristic—that they are all written on the side of libert He defended religious liberty against the prelates, ci liberty against the crown, the liberty of the press again the executive, liberty of conscience against the Presb terians, and domestic liberty against the tyranny of ca law. Milton's pamphlets might have been stamped w the motto which Selden inscribed (in Greek) in all books, "Liberty before everything."

One virtue these pamphlets possess, the virtue of They are monuments of our language so remarkabl Milton's prose works must always be resorted students, as long as English remains a medium of Yet even on the score of style, Milton's prose is to serious deductions. His negligence is such amount to an absence of construction. He who verse, trained the sentence with delicate sensi follow his guiding hand into exquisite syntax, his prose writing to abandon his meaning to itself. Here Milton compares disadvantageou Hooker. Hooker's elaborate sentence, like the

of Demosthenes, is composed of parts so hinged, of clauses so subordinated to the main thought, that we foresee the end from the beginning, and close the period with a sense of perfect roundness and totality. Milton does not seem to have any notion of what a period means. He begins anywhere, and leaves off, not when the sense closes, but when he is out of breath. We might have thought this pell-mell huddle of his words was explained, if not excused, by the exigencies of the party pamphlet, which cannot wait. But the same asyntactic disorder is equally found in the *History of Britain*, which he had in hand for forty years. Nor is it only the Miltonic sentence which is incoherent; the whole arrangement of his topics is equally loose, disjointed, and desultory. His inspiration comes from impulse. Had he stayed to chastise his emotional writing by reason and the laws of logic, he would have deprived himself of the sources of his strength.

These serious faults are balanced by virtues of another kind. Putting Bacon aside, the condensed force and poignant brevity of whose aphoristic wisdom has no parallel in English, there is no other prosaist who possesses anything like Milton's command over the resources of our language. Milton cannot match the musical harmony and exactly balanced periods of his predecessor Hooker. He is without the power of varied illustration, and accumulation of ornamental circumstance, possessed by his contemporary, Jeremy Taylor (1613—1667). But neither of these great writers impresses the reader with a sense of unlimited power such as we feel to reside in Milton. Vast as is the wealth of magnificent words which he flings with both hands carelessly upon the page, we feel that there is still much more in reserve.

The critics have observed (Collier's *Poetical Decameron*)

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...at as Milton advanced in life he gradually disused the compound words he had been in the habit of making for himself. However this may be, his words are the words of one who made a study of the language, as a poet studies language, searching its capacities for the expression of surging emotion. Jeremy Taylor's prose is poetical prose. Milton's prose is not poetical prose, but a different thing, the prose of a poet; not like Taylor's, loaded with imagery on the outside; but coloured by imagination from within. Milton is the first English writer who, possessing in the ancient models a standard of the effect which could be produced by choice of words, set himself to the conscious study of our native tongue with a firm faith in its as yet undeveloped powers as an instrument of thought.

The words in Milton's poems have been counted, and it appears that he employs 8000, while Shakspeare's play[s] and poems yield about 15,000. From this it might b[e] inferred that the Miltonic vocabulary is only half as ri[ch] as that of Shakspeare. But no inference can be found[ed] upon the absolute number of words used by any wri[ter]. We must know, not the total of different words, [but] the *proportion* of different words to the whole of [a] writer's words. Now to furnish a list of 100 diff[erent] words the English Bible requires 531 common w[ords], Shakspeare 164, Milton 135 only. This computat[ion is] founded on the poems; it would be curious to ha[ve the] same test tried upon the prose writings, though n[o such] test can be as trustworthy as the educated ear of a [reader] to a continued reading.

It is no part of a succinct biography, such as the[...] to furnish an account in detail of the various con[...] of the time, as Milton engaged in them. The r[...]

doubtless be content with the bare indication of the subjects on which he wrote. The whole number of Milton's political pamphlets is twenty-five. Of these, twenty-one are written in English, and four in Latin. Of the *Tractate of Education* and the four divorce pamphlets something has been already said. Of the remaining twenty, nine, or nearly half, relate to church government, or ecclesiastical affairs; eight treat of the various crises of the civil strife; and two are personal vindications of himself against one of his antagonists. There remains one tract of which the subject is of a more general and permanent nature, the best known of all the series, *Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of unlicensed Printing, to the Parliament of England.* The whole series of twenty-five extends over a period of somewhat less than twenty years; the earliest, viz., *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England, and the Causes that hitherto have hindered it*, having been published in 1641; the latest, entitled, *A ready and easy way to establish a free Commonwealth*, coming out in March, 1660, after the torrent of royalism had set in, which was to sweep away the men and the cause to which Milton had devoted himself. Milton's pen thus accompanied the whole of the Puritan revolution from the modest constitutional opposition in which it commenced, through its unexpected triumph, to its crushing overthrow by the royalist and clerical reaction.

The autumn of 1641 brought with it a sensible lull in the storm of revolutionary passion. Indeed, there began to appear all the symptoms of a reaction, and of the formation of a solid conservative party, likely to be strong enough to check, or even to suppress, the movement. The impulse seemed to have spent itself, and a desire for rest

n political agitation began to steal over the nation. tumn and the harvest turn men's thoughts towards untry occupations and sports. The King went off to cotland in August; the Houses adjourned till the 20th October. The Scottish army had been paid off, and had repassed the border; the Scottish commissioners and preachers had left London.

It was a critical moment for the Puritan party. Some very considerable triumphs they had gained. The arch-enemy Strafford had been brought to the block; Laud was in the tower; the leading members of Convocation, bishops, deans, and archdeacons, had been heavily fined; the Star Chamber and the High Commission Court had been abolished; the Stannary and Forestal jurisdictions restrained. But the Puritan movement aimed at far more than this. It was not only that the root-and-branch men were pushing for a generally more levelling policy, bu the whole Puritan party was committed to a struggle wit the hierarchy of the Established Church. It was not much that they demanded more and more reform, wi the growing appetite of revolution, but that as long bishops existed, nothing that had been wrested from th was secure. The Puritans could not exist in safety by side with a church whose principle was that there no church without the apostolic succession. The abo of episcopacy and the substitution of the Presby platform was, so it then seemed, a bare measure of eary precaution, and not merely the extravagant d of dissatisfied spirits. Add to this, that it w understood by those near enough to the princip in the drama, that the concessions made by th had been easily made, because they could be ta when the time should come, with equal ease.

most moderate men, who were satisfied with the amount of reform already obtained, must have trembled at its insecurity. The Puritan leaders must have viewed with dismay the tendency in the nation towards a reaction in favour of things as they were.

It was upon this condition of the public mind that Milton persistently poured pamphlet after pamphlet, successive vials of apocalyptic wrath. He exhausts all the resources of rhetoric, and plays upon every note in the gamut of public feeling, that he may rouse the apathetic, confirm the wavering, dumbfound the malignant; where there was zeal, to fan it into flame; where there was opposition, to cow and browbeat it by indignant scorn and terrific denunciation. The first of these manifestoes was (1) *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline*, of which I have already spoken. This was immediately followed by (2) *Of Prelaticall Episcopacy.* This tract was a reply, in form, to a publication of Archbishop Usher. It was about the end of May, 1641, that Usher had come forward on the breach with his *Judgment of Dr. Rainolds touching the Original of Episcopacy.* Rainolds, who had been President of Corpus (1598—1607), had belonged to the Puritan party in his day, had refused a bishopric, and was known, like Usher himself, to be little favourable to the exclusive claims of the high prelatists. He was thus an unexceptionable witness to adduce in favour of the apostolic origin of the distinction between bishop and presbyter. Usher, in editing Rainolds' opinions, had backed them up with all the additional citations which his vast reading could supply.

Milton could not speak with the weight that attached to Usher, the most learned Churchman of the age, who had spent eighteen years in going through a complete

course of fathers and councils. But, in the first paragraph of his answer, Milton adroitly puts the controversy upon a footing by which antiquarian research is put out of court. Episcopacy is either of human or divine origin. If of human origin, it may be either retained or abolished, as may be found expedient. If of divine appointment, it must be proved to be so out of Scripture. If this cannot be proved out of inspired Scripture, no accumulation of merely human assertion of the point can be of the least authority. Having thus shut out antiquity as evidence in the case, he proceeds nevertheless to examine his opponent's authorities, and sets them aside by a style of argument which has more of banter than of criticism.

One incident of this collision between Milton, young and unknown, and the venerable prelate, whom he was assaulting with the rude wantonness of untempered youth, deserves to be mentioned here. Usher had incautiously included the Ignatian epistles among his authorities. This laid the most learned man of the day at the mercy of an adversary of less reading than himself. Milton, who at least knew so much suspicion of the genuineness of these remains as Casaubon's *Exercitations on Baronius* and Vedelin's edition (Geneva, 1623) could suggest, pounced upon this critical flaw, and delightedly denounced in trenchant tones this "Perkin Warbeck of Ignatius," and the "supposititious offspring of some dozen epistles." This rude shock it was which set Usher upon a more careful examination of the Ignatian question. The result was his well-known edition of Ignatius, printed 1642, though not published till 1644, in which he acknowledged the total spuriousness of nine epistles, and the partial interpolation of the other six. I have not noticed in Usher's *Prolegomena* that he alludes to Milton's

of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem, that is a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things, not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.

"These reasonings together with a certain niceness of nature, an honest haughtiness and self-esteem, either of what I was or what I might be, which let envy call pride, and lastly that modesty, whereof, though not in the title-page, yet here, I may be excused to make some beseeming profession, all these uniting the supply of their natural aid together, kept me still above those low descents of mind, beneath which he must deject and plunge himself, that can agree to saleable and unlawful prostitutions.

"Next, for hear me out now, readers, that I may tell ye whither my younger feet wandered, I betook me among those lofty fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings, and from hence had in renown over all Christendom. There I read it in the oath of every knight, that he should defend to the expence of his best blood, or of his life if it so befel him, the honour and chastity of virgin or matron. From whence even then I learnt what a noble virtue chastity ever must be, to the defence of which so many worthies by such a dear adventure of themselves had sworn. And if I found in the story afterwards any of them by word or deed breaking that oath, I judged it the same fault of the poet as that which is attributed to Homer to have written undecent things of the gods. Only this my mind gave me, that every free and gentle spirit without that oath ought to be borne a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt spur, or the laying of a sword upon his shoulder, to stir him up both by his counsel and his arm to serve and protect the weakness of any attempted chastity. So that even those books which to many others have been the fuel of wantonness and loose living, I cannot think how unless by divine indulgence, proved to me so many incitements to the love and steadfast observation of virtue."

This is one of the autobiographical oases in these pam-

phlets, which are otherwise arid deserts of sand, scorched by the fire of extinct passion. It may be asked why it is that a few men, Gibbon or Milton, are indulged without challenge in talk about themselves, which would be childish vanity or odious egotism in others. When a Frenchman writes, "Nous avons tous, nous autres Français, des séduisantes qualités" (Gaffarel), he is ridiculous. The difference is not merely that we tolerate in a man of confessed superiority what would be intolerable in an equal. This is true; but there is a further distinction of moral quality in men's confessions. In Milton, as in Gibbon, the gratification of self-love, which attends all autobiography, is felt to be subordinated to a nobler intention. The lofty conception which Milton formed of his vocation as a poet, expands his soul and absorbs his personality. It is his office, and not himself, which he magnifies. The details of his life and nurture are important, not because they belong to him, but because he belongs, by dedication, to a high and sacred calling. He is extremely jealous, not of his own reputation, but of the credit which is due to lofty endeavour. We have only to compare Milton's magnanimous assumption of the first place with the paltry conceit with which, in the following age of Dryden and Pope, men spoke of themselves as authors, to see the wide difference between the professional vanity of successful authorship and the proud consciousness of a prophetic mission. Milton leads a dedicated life, and has laid down for himself the law that "he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem."

If Milton had not been the author of *Lycidas* and *Paradise Lost*, his political pamphlets would have been

as forgotten as are the thousand civil war tracts preserved in the Thomason collection in the Museum, or have served, at most, as philological landmarks. One, however, of his prose tracts has continued to enjoy some degree of credit down to the present time, for its matter as well as for its words, *Areopagitica.* This tract belongs to the year 1644, the most fertile year in Milton's life, as in it he brought out two of his divorce tracts, the *Tractate of Education*, and the *Areopagitica.* As Milton's moving principle was not any preconceived system of doctrine but the passion for liberty in general, it was natural that he should plead, when occasion called, for liberty of the press, among others. The occasion was one personal to himself.

It is well known that, early in the history of printing, governments became jealous of this new instrument for influencing opinion. In England, in 1556, under Mary, the Stationers' Company was invested with legal privileges, having the twofold object of protecting the book trade and controlling writers. All publications were required to be registered in the register of the company. No persons could set up a press without a licence, or print anything which had not been previously approved by some official censor. The court, which had come to be known as the court of Star-chamber, exercised criminal jurisdiction over offenders, and even issued its own decrees for the regulation of printing. The arbitrary action of this court had no small share in bringing about the resistance to Charles I. But the fall of the royal authority did not mean the emancipation of the press. The Parliament had no intention of letting go the control which the monarchy had exercised; the incidence of the coercion was to be shifted from themselves upon their

opponents. The Star-chamber was abolished, but its powers of search and seizure were transferred to the Company of Stationers. Licensing was to go on as before, but to be exercised by special commissioners, instead of by the Archbishop and the Bishop of London. Only whereas, before, contraband had consisted of Presbyterian books, henceforward it was Catholic and Anglican books which would be suppressed.

Such was not Milton's idea of the liberty of thought and speech in a free commonwealth. He had himself written for the Presbyterians four unlicensed pamphlets. It was now open to him to write any number, and to get them licensed, provided they were written on the same side. This was not liberty, as he had learned it in his classics, "ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias dicere licet." Over and above this encroachment on the liberty of the free citizen, it so happened that at this moment Milton himself was concerned to ventilate an opinion which was not Presbyterian, and had no chance of passing a Presbyterian licenser. His *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* was just ready for press when the ordinance of 1643 came into operation. He published it without licence and without printer's name, in defiance of the law, and awaited the consequences. There were no consequences. He repeated the offence in a second edition in February, 1644, putting his name now (the first edition had been anonymous), and dedicating it to the very Parliament whose ordinance he was setting at nought. This time the Commons, stirred up by a petition from the Company of Stationers, referred the matter to the committee of printing. It went no further. Either it was deemed inexpedient to molest so sound a Parliamentarian as Milton, or Cromwell's "accommodation resolution" of

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September 13, 1644, opened the eyes of the Presbyterian zealots to the existence in the kingdom of a new, and much wider, phase of opinion, which ominously threatened the compact little edifice of Presbyterian truth that they had been erecting with a profound conviction of its exclusive orthodoxy.

The occurrence had been sufficient to give a new direction to Milton's thoughts. Regardless of the fact that his plea for liberty in marriage had fallen upon deaf ears, he would plead for liberty of speech. The *Areopagitica, for the Liberty of unlicensed Printing*, came out in November, 1644, an unlicensed, unregistered publication, without printer's or bookseller's name. It was cast in the form of a speech addressed to the Parliament. The motto was taken from Euripides, and printed in the original Greek, which was not, when addressed to the Parliament of 1644, the absurdity which it would be now. The title is less appropriate, being borrowed from the *Areopagitic Discourse* of Isocrates, between which and Milton's *Speech* there is no resemblance either in subject or style. All that the two productions have in common is their form. They are both unspoken orations, written to the address of a representative assembly—the one to the Boulé or Senate of Athens, the other to the Parliament of England

Milton's *Speech* is in his own best style; a copious flood of majestic eloquence, the outpouring of a noble soul with a divine scorn of narrow dogma and paltry aims. But it is a mere pamphlet, extemporised in, at most, a month or two, without research or special knowledge, with no attempt to ascertain general principles, and more than Milton's usual disregard of method. A jurist's question is here handled by a rhetorician. He has preached a noble and heart-stirring sermon on his text,

but the problem for the legislator remains where it was. The vagueness and confusion of the thoughts finds a vehicle in language which is too often overcrowded and obscure. I think the *Areopagitica* has few or no offences against taste; on the other hand, it has few or none of those grand passages which redeem the scurrility of his political pamphlets. The passage in which Milton's visit to Galileo "grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition," is mentioned, is often quoted for its biographical interest; and the terse dictum, "as good almost kill a man as kill a good book," has passed into a current axiom. A paragraph at the close, where he hints that the time may be come to suppress the suppressors, intimates, but so obscurely as to be likely to escape notice, that Milton had already made up his mind that a struggle with the Presbyterian party was to be the sequel of the overthrow of the Royalists. He has not yet arrived at the point he will hereafter reach, of rejecting the very idea of a minister of religion, but he is already aggrieved by the implicit faith which the Puritan laity, who had cast out bishops, were beginning to bestow upon their pastor; "a factor to whose care and credit he may commit the whole managing of his religious affairs." Finally, it must be noted, that Milton, though he had come to see round Presbyterianism, had not, in 1644, shaken off all dogmatic profession. His toleration of opinion was far from complete. He would call in the intervention of the executioner in the case of "mischievous and libellous books," and could not bring himself to contemplate the toleration of Popery and open superstition, "which as it extirpates all religious and civil supremacies, so itself should be extirpate; provided first that all charitable and compassionate means be used to win and gain the weak and misled."

The *Areopagitica*, as might be expected, produced no effect upon the legislation of the Long Parliament, of whom (says Hallam) "very few acts of political wisdom or courage are recorded." Individual licensers became more lax in the performance of the duty, but this is reasonably to be ascribed to the growing spirit of independency—a spirit which was incompatible with any embargo on the utterance of private opinion. A curious epilogue to the history of this publication is the fact, first brought to light by Mr. Masson, that the author of the *Areopagitica*, at a later time, acted himself in the capacity of licenser. It was in 1651, under the Commonwealth, Marchmont Needham being editor of the weekly paper called *Mercurius Politicus*, that Milton was associated with him as his censor or supervising editor. Mr. Masson conjectures, with some probability, that the leading articles of the *Mercurius*, during part of the year 1651, received touches from Milton's hand. But this was, after all, rather in the character of editor, whose business it is to see that nothing improper goes into the paper, than in that of press licenser in the sense in which the *Areopagitica* had denounced it.

CHAPTER VII.

BIOGRAPHICAL. 1640—1649.

September, 1645, Milton left the garden-house in ldersgate, for a larger house in Barbican, in the ame neighbourhood, but a little further from the city gate, i.e. more in the country. The larger house was, perhaps, required for the accommodation of his pupils (see above, p. 44), but it served to shelter his wife's family, when they were thrown upon the world by the surrender of Oxford in June, 1646. In this Barbican house Mr. Powell died at the end of that year. Milton had been promised with his wife a portion of 1000*l.*; but Mr. Powell's affairs had long been in a very embarrassed condition, and now by the consequences of delinquency. that condition had become one of absolute ruin. Great pains have been bestowed by Mr. Masson in unravelling the entanglement of the Powell accounts. The data which remain are ample, and we cannot but feel astonished at the accuracy with which our national records, in more im portant matters so defective, enable us to set out a debto and creditor balance of the estate of a private citizen, wh died more than 200 years ago. But the circumstances a peculiarly intricate, and we are still unable to reconc

Mr. Powell's will with the composition records, both of which are extant. As a compounding delinquent, his fine, assessed at the customary rate of two years' income, was fixed by the commissioners at 180*l*. The commissioners must have, therefore, been satisfied that his income did not exceed 90*l*. a year. Yet by his will of date December 30, 1646, he leaves his estate of Forest Hill, the annual value of which alone far exceeded 90*l*., to his eldest son. This property is not mentioned in the inventory of his estate, real and personal, laid before the commissioners, sworn to by the delinquent, and by them accepted. The possible explanation is that the Forest Hill property had really passed into the possession, by foreclosure, of the mortgagee, Sir Robert Pye, who sate for Woodstock in the Long Parliament, but that Mr. Powell, making his will on his deathbed, pleased himself with the fancy of leaving his son and heir an estate which was no longer his to dispose of. Putting Forest Hill out of the account, it would appear that the sequestrators had dealt somewhat harshly with Mr. Powell; for they had included in their estimate one doubtful asset of 500*l*., and one non-existent of 400*l*. This last item was a stock of timber stated to be at Forest Hill, but which had really been appropriated without payment by the Parliamentarians, and part of it voted by Parliament itself towards repair of the church in the staunch Puritan town of Banbury.

The upshot of the whole transaction is that, in satisfaction of his claim of 1500*l*. (1000*l*. his wife's dower, 500*l*. an old loan of 1627), Milton came into possession of some property at Wheatley. This property, consisting of the tithes of Wheatley, certain cottages, and three and a half yard lands, had in the time of the disturbances produced only 40*l*. a year. But as the value of all property

improved when the civil war came to an end, Milton found the whole could now be let for 80*l.* But then out of this he had to pay Mr. Powell's composition, reduced to 130*l.* on Milton's petition, and the widow's jointure, computed at 26*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* per annum. What of income remained after these disbursements he might apply towards repaying himself the old loan of 1627. This was all Milton ever saw of the 1000*l.* which Mr. Powell, with the *high-flying magnificence* of a cavalier who knew he was ruined, had promised as his daughter's portion.

Mr. Powell's death was followed in less than three months by that of John Milton, senior. He died in the house in Barbican, and the entry, "John Milton, gentleman, 15 (March)," among the burials in 1646, is still to be seen in the register of the parish of St Giles's, Cripplegate. A host of eminent men have traced the first impulse of their genius to their mother. Milton always acknowledged with just gratitude that it was to his father's discerning taste and fostering care, that he owed the encouragement of his studies, and the leisure which rendered them possible. He has registered this gratitude in both prose and verse. The Latin hexameters, "Ad patrem," written at Horton, are inspired by a feeling far beyond commonplace filial piety, and a warmth which is rare indeed in neo-Latin versification. And when, in his prose pamphlets, he has occasion to speak of himself, he does not omit the acknowledgment of "the ceaseless diligence and care *of my father,* whom God recompense." (*Reason of Church Government.*)

After the death of his father, being *now more at ease* in his circumstances, he gave up taking *pupils*, and quitted the large house in Barbican *for a smaller in* High Holborn, opening backwards *into Lincoln's-Inn-Fields.* This removal was about Michaelmas, 1

During this period, 1639—1649, while his interests were engaged by the all-absorbing events of the civil strife, he wrote no poetry, or none deserving the name. All artists have intervals of non-productiveness, usually caused by exhaustion. This was not Milton's case. His genius was not his master, nor could it pass, like that of Leonardo da Vinci, unmoved through the most tragic scenes. He deliberately suspended it at the call of what he believed to be duty to his country. His unrivalled power of expression was placed at the service of a passionate political conviction. This prostitution of faculty avenged itself; for when he did turn to poetry, his strength was gone from him. The period is chiefly marked by sonnets, not many, one in a year, or thereabouts. That *On the religious memory of Mrs. Catherine Thomson*, in 1646, is the lowest point touched by Milton in poetry, for his metrical psalms do not deserve the name.

The sonnet, or Elegy on Mrs. Catherine Thomson in the form of a sonnet, though in poetical merit not distinguishable from the average religious verse of the Caroline age, has an interest for the biographer. It breathes a holy calm that is in sharp contrast with the angry virulence of the pamphlets, which were being written at this very time by the same pen. Amid his intemperate denunciations of his political and ecclesiastical foes, it seems that Milton did not inwardly forfeit the peace which passeth all understanding. He had formerly said himself (*Doctrine and Disc.*), "nothing more than disturbance of mind suspends us from approaching to God." Now, out of all the clamour and the bitterness of the battle of the sects, he can retire and be alone with his heavenly aspirations, which have lost none of their ardour by having laid aside all their sectarianism. His genius has forsaken him, but his soul still glows with the fervour of

devotion. And even of this sonnet we may say what Ellis says of Catullus, that Milton never ceases to be a poet, even when his words are most prosaic.

The sonnet (xv.) *On the Lord-General Fairfax, at the siege of Colchester*, written in 1648, is again a manifesto of the writer's political feelings, nobly uttered, and investing party with a patriotic dignity not unworthy of the man, Milton It is a hortatory lyric, a trumpet-call to his party in the moment of victory to remember the duties which that victory imposed upon them. It is not without the splendid resonance of the Italian canzone. But it can scarcely be called poetry, expressing, as it does, facts directly, and not indirectly through their imaginative equivalents. Fairfax was, doubtless, well worthy that Milton should have commemorated him in a higher strain. Of Fairfax's eminent qualities the sonnet only dwells on two, his personal valour, which had been tried in many fights—he had been three times dangerously wounded in the Yorkshire campaign—and his superiority to sordid interests. Of his generalship, in which he was second to Cromwell only, and of his love of arts and learning, nothing is said, though the last was the passion of his life, for which at forty he renounced ambition. Perhaps in 1648 Milton, who lived a very retired life, did not know of these tastes, and had not heard that it was by Fairfax's care that the Bodleian library was saved from wreck on the surrender of Oxford in 1646. And it was not till later, years after the sonnet was written, that the same Fairfax, "whose name in arms through Europe rings," became a competitor of Milton in the attempt to paraphrase the Psalms in metre.

Milton's paraphrase of the Psalms belongs to history, but to the history of psalmody, not that of poetry. At St. Paul's School, at fifteen, the boy had turned two

the 114th and the 136th, by way of exercise. That in his day of plenary inspiration, Milton, who disdained Dryden as "a rhymist but no poet," and has recorded his own impatience with the "drawling versifiers," should have undertaken to grind down the noble antistrophic lyrics of the Hebrew bard into ballad rhymes for the use of Puritan worship, would have been impossible. But the idea of being useful to his country had acquired exclusive possession of his mind. Even his faculty of verse should be employed in the good cause. If Parliament had set him the task, doubtless he would have willingly undertaken it, as Corneille, in the blindness of Catholic obedience, versified the *Imitatio Christi* at the command of the Jesuits. Milton was not officially employed, but voluntarily took up the work. The Puritans were bent upon substituting a new version of the Davidic Psalms for that of Sternhold and Hopkins, for no other reason than that the latter formed part of the hated Book of Common Prayer. The Commons had pronounced in favour of a version by one of their own members, the staunch Puritan M.P. for Truro, Francis Rouse. The Lords favoured a rival book, and numerous other claimants were before the public. Dissatisfied with any of these attempts, Milton would essay himself. In 1648 he turned nine psalms, and recurring to the task in 1653, "did into verse" eight more. He thought these specimens worth preserving, and annexing to the volume of his poems which he published himself in 1673. As this doggerel continues to encumber each succeeding edition of the *Poetical Works*, it is as well that Milton did not persevere with his experiment and produce a complete Psalter. He prudently abandoned a task in which success is impossible. A metrical psalm, being a compromise between the psalm and the hymn, like other compro-

mises, misses, rather than combines, the distinctive excellences of the things united. That Milton should ever have attempted what poetry forbids, is only another proof how entirely at this period more absorbing motives had possession of his mind, and overbore his poetical judgment. It is a coincidence worth remembering that Milton's contemporary, Lord Clarendon, was at this very time solacing his exile at Madrid by composing, not a version but a commentary upon the Psalms, "applying those devotions to the troubles of this time."

Yet all the while that he was thus unfaithful in practice to his art, it was poetry that possessed his real affections, and the reputation of a poet which formed his ambition. It was a temporary separation, and not a divorce, which he designed. In each successive pamphlet he reiterates his undertaking to redeem his pledge of a great work, as soon as liberty shall be consolidated in the realm. Meanwhile, as an earnest of what should be hereafter, he permitted the publication of a collection of his early poems.

This little volume of some 200 pages, rude in execution as it is, ranks among the highest prizes of the book collector, very few copies being extant, and those mostly in public libraries. It appeared in 1645, and owed its appearance, not to the vanity of the author, but to the zeal of a publisher. Humphrey Moseley, at the sign of the Prince's Arms, in St. Paul's Churchyard, suggested the collection to Milton, and undertook the risk of it, though knowing, as he says in the prefixed address of The Stationer to the Reader, that "the slightest pamphlet is nowadays more vendible than the works of learnedest men." It may create some surprise that, in 1645, there should have been any public in England

a volume of verse. Naseby had been fought in June, Philiphaugh in September, Fairfax and Cromwell were continuing their victorious career in the west, Chester, Worcester, and the stronghold of Oxford, alone holding out for the King. It was clear that the conflict was decided in favour of the Parliament, but men's minds must have been strung to a pitch of intense expectation as to what kind of settlement was to come. Yet, at the very crisis of the civil strife, we find a London publisher able to bring out the Poems of Waller (1644), and sufficiently encouraged by their reception to follow them up, in the next year, with the Poems of Mr. John Milton. Are we warranted in inferring that a finer public was beginning to loathe the dreary theological polemic of which it had had a surfeit, and turned to a book of poetry as that which was most unlike the daily garbage, just as a later public absorbed five thousand copies of Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* in the year of Austerlitz? One would like to know who were the purchasers of Milton and Waller, when the cavalier families were being ruined by confiscations and compositions, and Puritan families would turn with pious horror from the very name of a Mask.

Milton was himself editor of his own volume, and prefixed to it, again out of Virgil's Eclogues, the characteristic motto, "Baccare frontem Cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua *futuro*," indicating that his poetry was all to come.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LATIN SECRETARYSHIP.

Crown having fallen on January 30, 1649, and the use of Lords by the vote of February 6 following, e sovereign power in England was for the moment in e hands of that fragment of the Long Parliament, which mained after the various purges and expulsions to which t had been subjected. Some of the excluded members were allowed to return, and by occasional new elections in safe boroughs the number of members was raised to one hundred and fifty, securing an average attendance of about seventy. The future government of the nation was declared to be by way of a republic, and the writs ran in the name of the Keepers of the Liberty of England by authority of Parliament. But the real centre . power was the Council of State, a body of forty-o members, nominated for a period of twelve months, according to a plan of constitution devised by the army leaders. In the hands of this republican Council was concentrated a combination of power such as had never been wielded by any English monarch. But, though its attribution of authority was great, its exercise of the powers lodged with it was hampered by differences

its members, and the disaffection of various interests and parties. The Council of State contained most of the notable statesmen of the Parliamentary party, and had before it a vast task in reorganizing the administration of England, in the conduct of an actual war in Ireland, a possible war in Scotland, and in the maintenance of the honour of the republic in its relations with foreign princes.

The Council of State prepared the business for its consideration through special committees for special departments of the public service. The Committee for Foreign Affairs consisted of Whitelocke, Vane, Lord Lisle, Lord Denbigh, Mr. Marten, Mr. Lisle. A secretary was required to translate despatches, both those which were sent out, and those which were received. Nothing seems more natural than that the author of the *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, who was at once a staunch Parliamentarian, an accomplished Latin scholar, and conversant with more than one of the spoken languages of the Continent, should be thought of for the office. Yet so little was Milton personally known, living as he did the life of a retired student, that it was the accident of his having the acquaintance of one of the new Council to which he owed the appointment.

The post was offered him, but would he accept it? He had never ceased to revolve in his mind subjects capable of poetical treatment, and to cherish his own vocation as the classical poet of the English language. Peace had come, and leisure was within his reach. He was poor, but his wants were simple, and he had enough wherewith to meet them. Already, in 1649, unmistakable symptoms threatened his sight, and warned him of the necessity of the most rigid economy in the use of the eyes. The duties that he was now asked to undertake were in-

definite already in amount, and would doubtless extend themselves if zealously discharged.

But the temptation was strong, and he did not resist it. The increase of income was, doubtless, to Milton the smallest among the inducements now offered him. He had thought it a sufficient and an honourable employment to serve his country with his pen as a volunteer. Here was an offer to become her official, authorised servant, and to bear a part, though a humble part, in the great work of reorganisation which was now to be attempted. Above all other allurements to a retired student, unversed in men, and ready to idealise character, was the opportunity of becoming at once personally acquainted with all the great men of the patriotic party, whom his ardent imagination had invested with heroic qualities. The very names of Fairfax, Vane, and Cromwell, called up in him emotions for which prose was an inadequate vehicle. Nor was it only that in the Council itself he would be in daily intercourse with such men as Henry Marten, Hutchinson, Whitelocke, Harrington, St. John, Ludlow, but his position would introduce him at once to all the members of the House who were worth knowing. It was not merely a new world; it was *the* world which was here opened for the first time to Milton. And we must remember that, all scholar as he was, Milton was well convinced of the truth that there are other sources of knowledge besides books. He had himself spent "many studious and contemplative years in the search of religious and civil knowledge," yet he knew that, for a mind large enough to "take in a general survey of humane things," it was necessary to know—

> The world, . . . her glory,
> Empires and monarchs,
> Best school of best experience,

He had repeatedly, as if excusing his political interludes, renewed his pledge to devote all his powers to poetry as soon as they should be fully ripe. To complete his education as a poet, he wanted initiation into affairs. Here was an opening far beyond any he had ever dreamed of. The sacrifice of time and precious eyesight which he was to make was costly, but it was not pure waste; it would be partly returned to him in a ripened experience in this

> Insight
> In all things that to greatest actions lead.

He accepted the post at once without hesitation. On March 13, 1649, the Committee for Foreign Affairs was directed to make the offer to him; on March 15, he attended at Whitehall to be admitted to office. Well would it have been both for his genius and his fame if he had declined it. His genius might have reverted to its proper course, while he was in the flower of age, with eyesight still available, and a spirit exalted by the triumph of the good cause. His fame would have been saved from the degrading incidents of the contention with Salmasius and Morus, and from being tarnished by the obloquy of the faction which he fought, and which conquered him. No man can with impunity insult and trample upon his fellow-man, even in the best of causes. Especially if he be an artist, he makes it impossible to obtain equitable appreciation of his work.

So far as Milton reckoned upon a gain in experience from his secretaryship, he doubtless reaped it. Such a probation could not be passed without solidifying the judgment, and correcting its tendency to error. And this school of affairs, which is indispensable for the historian,

may also be available for the poet. Yet it would be difficult to point in Milton's subsequent poetry to any element which the poet can be thought to have imbibed from the foreign secretary. Where, as in Milton's two epics and *Samson Agonistes*, the personages are all supernatural or heroic, there is no room for the employment of knowledge of the world. Had Milton written comedy, like Molière, he might have said with Molière after he had been introduced at court, "Je n'ai plus que faire d'étudier Plaute et Terence; je n'ai qu'à étudier le monde."

The office into which Milton was now inducted is called in the Council books that of "Secretary for foreign tongues." Its duties were chiefly the translation of despatches from, and to, foreign governments. The degree of estimation in which the Latin secretary was held, may be measured by the amount of salary assigned him. For while the English chief Secretary had a salary of 730*l.* (= 2200*l.* of our day), the Latin Secretary was paid only 288*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.* (= 900*l.*). For this, not very liberal pay, he was told that all his time was to be at the disposal of the government. Lincoln's Inn Fields was too far off for a servant of the Council who might have to attend meetings at seven in the morning. He accordingly migrated to Charing Cross, now become again Charing without the cross, this work of art having been an early (1647) victim of religious barbarism. In November he was accommodated with chambers in Whitehall. But from these he was soon ousted by claimants more considerable or more importunate, and in 1651 he removed to "a pretty garden-house" in Petty France, in Westminster, next door to the Lord Scudamore's, and opening into St. James's Park. The house was extant

till 1877, when it disappeared, the last of Milton's many London residences. It had long ceased to look into St. James's Park, more than one row of houses, encroachments upon the public park, having grown up between. The garden-house had become a mere ordinary street house in York-street, only distinguished from the squalid houses on either side of it by a tablet affixed by Bentham, inscribed "sacred to Milton, prince of poets." Petty France lost its designation in the French Revolution, in obedience to the childish petulance which obliterates the name of any one who may displease you at the moment, and became one of the seventeen York-streets of the metropolis. Soon after the re-baptism of the street, Milton's house was occupied by William Hazlitt, who rented it of Bentham. Milton had lived in it for nine years, from 1651 till a few weeks before the Restoration. Its nearness to Whitehall where the Council sat, was less a convenience than a necessity.

For Milton's life now became one of close attention, and busy service. As Latin secretary, and Weckherlin's successor, indeed, his proper duties were only those of a clerk or translator. But his aptitude for business of a literary kind soon drew on him a great variety of employment. The demand for a Latin translation of a despatch was not one of frequent occurrence. The Letters of the Parliament, and of Oliver and Richard, Protectors, which are, intrusively, printed among Milton's works, are but one hundred and thirty-seven in all. This number is spread over ten years, being at the rate of about fourteen per year; most of them are very short. For the purposes of a biography of Milton, it is sufficient to observe, that the dignified attitude which the Commonwealth took up towards foreign powers lost none of its elevation in being

conveyed in Miltonic Latin. Whether satisfaction for the murder of an envoy is to be extorted from the arrogant court of Madrid, or an apology is to be offered to a humble count of Oldenburg for delay in issuing a salvaguardia which had been promised, the same equable dignity of expression is maintained, equally remote from crouching before the strong, and hectoring the weak.

His translations were not all the duties of the new secretary. He must often serve as interpreter at audiences of foreign envoys. He must superintend the semi-official organ, the *Mercurius Politicus*. He must answer the manifesto of the Presbyterians of Ireland. The *Observations* on the peace of Kilkenny are Milton's composition, but from instructions. By the peace the Irish had obtained home rule in its widest extent, release from the oath of supremacy, and the right to tie their ploughs to the tail of the horse. The same peace also conceded to them the militia, a trust which Charles I. had said he would not devolve on the Parliament of England, "not for an hour!" Milton is indignant that these indulgences, which had been refused to their obedience, should have been extorted by their rebellion, and the massacre of "200,000 Protestants." This is an exaggeration of a butchery sufficiently tragic in its real proportions, and in a later tract (*Eikonoklastes*) he reduces it to 154,000. Though the savage Irish are barbarians, uncivilised and uncivilisable, the *Observations* distinctly affirm the new principle of toleration. Though popery be a supersti- [illegible]

[illegible]

that the one exception to this toleration is atheism, Milton is careful to state this *limitation* as being the tolera-

tion professed by Parliament, and not as his private opinion.

So well satisfied were the Council with their secretary's *Observations* on the peace of Kilkenny, that they next imposed upon him a far more important labour, a reply to the *Eikon Basiliké*. The execution of Charles I. was not an act of vengeance, but a measure of public safety. If, as Hallam affirms, there mingled in the motives of the managers any strain of personal ill-will, this was merged in the necessity of securing, themselves from the vengeance of the King, and what they had gained from being taken back. They were alarmed by the reaction which had set in, and had no choice but to strengthen themselves by a daring policy. But the first effect of the removal of the King by violence was to give a powerful stimulus to the reaction already in progress. The groan which burst from the spectators before Whitehall on January 30, 1649, was only representative of the thrill of horror which ran through England and Scotland in the next ten days. This feeling found expression in a book entitled "*Eikon Basiliké*, the portraiture of his sacred majesty in his solitude and sufferings." The book was, it should seem, composed by Dr. Gauden, but professed to be an authentic copy of papers written by the King. It is possible that Gauden may have had in his hands some written scraps of the King's meditations. If he had such, he only used them as hints to work upon. Gauden was a churchman whom his friends might call liberal, and his enemies time-serving. He was a churchman of the stamp of Archbishop Williams, and preferred bishops and the Common-prayer to presbyters and extempore sermons, but did not think the difference between the two of the essence of religion. In better times Gauden would have

passed for broad, though his latitudinarianism was more the result of love of ease than of philosophy. Though a royalist he sat in the Westminster Assembly, and took the covenant, for which compliance he nearly lost the reward which, after the Restoration, became his due. Like the university-bred men of his day, Gauden was *not a man of ideas, but of style.* In the present instance the idea was supplied by events. The saint and martyr, the man of sorrows, praying for his murderers, the King, who renounced an earthly kingdom to gain a heavenly, and who in return for his benefits received from an unthankful people a crown of thorns—this was the theme supplied to the royalist advocate. Poet's imagination had never invented one more calculated to touch the popular heart. This *imitatio Christi* to which every private Christian theoretically aspires, had been realised by a true prince upon an actual scaffold with a graceful dignity of demeanour, of which it may be said, that nothing in life became him like the leaving it.

This moving situation Gauden, no mean stylist, set out in the best academical language of the period. Frigid and artificial it may read now, but the passion and pity, which is not in the book, was supplied by the readers of the time. And men are not dainty as to phrase when they meet with an expression of their own sentiments. The readers of *Eikon Basilike*—and forty-seven editions were necessary to supply the demand of a population of eight millions—attributed to the pages of the book emotions raised in themselves by the tragic catastrophe. They never doubted that the meditations were those of the royal martyr, and held the book, in the words of Sir Edward Nicholas, for "the most exquisite, pious, and princely piece ever written." The Parliament thought

themselves called upon to put forth a reply. If one book could cause such a commotion of spirits, another book could allay it—the ordinary illusion of those who do not consider that the vogue of a printed appeal depends, not on the contents of the appeal, but on a predisposition of the public temper.

Selden, the most learned man, not only of his party, but of Englishmen, was first thought of, but the task was finally assigned to the Latin Secretary. Milton's ready pen completed the answer, *Eikonoklastes*, a quarto of 242 pages, before October, 1649. It is, like all answers, worthless as a book. Eikonoklastes, the Image-breaker, takes the Image, Eikon, paragraph by paragraph, turning it round, and asserting the negative. To the Royalist view of the points in dispute Milton opposes the Independent view. A refutation, which follows each step of an adverse book, is necessarily devoid of originality. But Milton is worse than tedious; his reply is in a tone of rude railing and insolent swagger, which would have been always unbecoming, but which at this moment was grossly indecent.

Milton must, however, be acquitted of one charge which has been made against him, viz., that he taunts the king with his familiarity with Shakespeare. The charge rests on a misunderstanding. In quoting *Richard III.* in illustration of his own meaning, Milton says, "I shall not instance an abstruse author, wherein the King might be less conversant, but one whom we well know was the closet companion of these his solitudes, William Shakespeare." Though not an overt gibe, there certainly lurks an insinuation to Milton's Puritan readers, to whom stage plays were an abomination—an unworthy device of rhetoric, as appealing to a superstition in others which

the writer himself does not share. In Milton's contemptuous reference to Sidney's *Arcadia* as a vain amatorious poem, we feel that the finer sense of the author of *L'Allegro* has suffered from immersion in the slough of religious and political faction.

Gauden, raking up material from all quarters, had inserted in his compilation a prayer taken from the *Arcadia*. Milton mercilessly works this topic against his adversary. It is surprising that this plagiarism from so well-known a book as the *Arcadia* should not have opened Milton's eyes to the unauthentic character of the *Eikon*. He alludes, indeed, to a suspicion which was abroad that one of the royal chaplains was a secret coadjutor. But he knew nothing of Gauden at the time of writing the *Eikonoklastes*, and probably he never came to know anything. The secret of the authorship of the *Eikon* was well kept, being known only to a very few persons—the two royal brothers, Bishop Morley, the Earl of Bristol, and Clarendon. These were all safe men, and Gauden was not likely to proclaim himself an impostor. He pleaded his authorship, however, as a claim to preferment at the Restoration, when the church spoils came to be partitioned among the conquerors, and he received the bishopric of Exeter. A bishopric—because less than the highest preferment could not be offered to one whose pen had done such signal service; and Exeter—because the poorest see (then valued at 500*l.* a year) was good enough for a man who had taken the covenant and complied with the usurping government. By ceaseless importunity the author of the *Eikon Basilike* obtained afterwards the see of Worcester, while the portion of the author of *Eikonoklastes* was poverty, infamy, and calumny. A century after Milton's death it was safe for the most popular

writer of the day to say that the prayer from the *Arcadia* had been interpolated in the *Eikon* by Milton himself, and then by him charged upon the King as a plagiarism. (Johnson, *Lives of the Poets.*)

CHAPTER IX.

MILTON AND SALMASIUS.—BLINDNESS.

The mystery which long surrounded the authorship of *Eikon Basilike* lends a literary interest to Milton's share in that controversy, which does not belong to his next appearance in print. Besides, his pamphlets against Salmasius and Morus are written in Latin, and to the general reader in this country and in America inaccessible in consequence. In Milton's day it was otherwise; the widest circle of readers could only be reached through Latin. For this reason, when Charles II. wanted a public vindication of his father's memory, it was indispensable that it should be composed in that language. The *Eikon* was accordingly turned into Latin, by one of the royal chaplains, Earle, afterwards Bishop of Salisbury. But this was not enough; a defence in form was necessary, an *Apologia Socratis*, such as Plato composed for his master after his death. It must not only be written in Latin, but in such Latin as to ensure its being read.

In 1649 Charles II. was living at the Hague, and it so happened that the man, who was in the highest repute in all Europe as a Latinist, was professor at the neighbouring university of Leyden. Salmasius (Claude de Saumaise)

was commissioned to prepare a manifesto, which should be at once a vindication of Charles's memory, and an indictment against the regicide government. Salmasius was a man of enormous reading and no judgment. He says of himself that he wrote Latin more easily than his mother-tongue (French). And his Latin was all the more readable because it was not classical or idiomatic. With all his reading—and Isaac Casaubon had said of him when in his teens that he had incredible erudition—he was still, at sixty, quite unacquainted with public affairs, and had neither the politician's tact necessary to draw a state paper as Clarendon would have drawn it, nor the literary tact which had enabled Erasmus to command the ear of the public. Salmasius undertook his task as a professional advocate, though without pay, and Milton accepted the duty of replying as advocate for the Parliament, also without reward; he was fighting for a cause which was not another's but his own.

Salmasius' *Defensio regia*—that was the title of his book—reached this country before the end of 1649. The Council of State, in very unnecessary alarm, issued a prohibition. On 8th January, 1650, the Council ordered "that Mr. Milton do prepare something in answer to the book of Salmasius." Early in March, 1651, Milton's answer, entitled *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, was out.

Milton was as much above Salmasius in mental power as he was inferior to him in extent of book knowledge. But the conditions of retort which he had chosen to accept neutralised this superiority. His greater power was spent in a greater force of invective. Instead of setting out the case of the Parliament in all the strength of which it was capable, Milton is intent upon tripping up Salmasius, contradicting him, and making him odious

or ridiculous. He called his book a *Defence of the People of England*; but when he should have been justifying his clients from the charges of rebellion and regicide before the bar of Europe, Milton is bending all his invention upon personalities. He exaggerates the foibles of Salmasius, his vanity, and the vanity of Madame de Saumaise, her ascendancy over her husband, his narrow pedantry, his ignorance of everything but grammar and words. He exhausts the Latin vocabulary of abuse to pile up every epithet of contumely and execration on the head of his adversary. It but amounts to calling Salmasius fool and knave through a couple of hundred pages, till the exaggeration of the style defeats the orator's purpose, and we end by regarding the whole, not as a serious pleading, but as an epideictic display. Hobbes said truly that the two books were "like two declamations, for and against, made by one and the same man as a rhetorical exercise" (*Behemoth*).

Milton's *Defensio* was not calculated to advance the cause of the Parliament, and there is no evidence that it produced any effect upon the public, beyond that of raising Milton's personal credit. That England, and Puritan England, where humane studies were swamped in a biblical brawl, should produce a man who could write Latin as well as Salmasius, was a great surprise to the learned world in Holland. Salmasius was unpopular at Leyden, and there was therefore a predisposition to regard Milton's book with favour. Salmasius was twenty years older than Milton, and in these literary digladiations readers are always ready to side with a new writer. The contending interests of the two great English parties, the wider issue between republic and absolutism, the speculative inquiry into the right of resistance, were lost sight of by the

spectators of this literary duel. The only question was whether Salmasius could beat the new champion, or the new man beat Salmasius, at a match of vituperation.

Salmasius of course put in a rejoinder. His rapid pen found no difficulty in turning off 300 pages of fluent Latin. It was his last occupation. He died at Spa, where he was taking the waters, in September, 1653, and his reply was not published till 1660, after the Restoration, when all interest had died out of the controversy. If it be true that the work was written at Spa, without books at hand, it is certainly a miraculous effort of memory. It does no credit to Salmasius. He had raked together, after the example of Scioppius against Scaliger, all the tittle-tattle which the English exiles had to retail about Milton and his antecedents. Bramhall, who bore Milton a special grudge, was the channel of some of this scandal, and Bramhall's source was possibly Chappell, the tutor with whom Milton had had the early misunderstanding. (See above p. 6). If any one thinks that classical studies of themselves cultivate the taste and the sentiments, let him look into Salmasius's *Responsio*. There he will see the first scholar of his age not thinking it unbecoming to taunt Milton with his blindness, in such language as this: "a puppy, once my pretty little man, now blear-eyed, or rather a blindling; having never had any mental vision, he has now lost his bodily sight; a silly coxcomb, fancying himself a beauty; an unclean beast, with nothing more human about him than his guttering eyelids; the fittest doom for him would be to hang him on the highest gallows, and set his head on the Tower of London." These are some of the incivilities, not by any means the most revolting, but such as I dare reproduce, of this literary warfare.

Salmasius's taunt about Milton's venal pen is no less false than his other gibes. The places of those who served the Commonwealth, were places of "hard work and short rations." Milton never received for his *Defensio* a sixpence beyond his official salary. It has indeed been asserted that he was paid 1000*l.* for it by order of Parliament, and this falsehood having been adopted by Johnson —himself a pensioner—has passed into all the biographies, and will no doubt continue to be repeated to the end of time. This is a just nemesis upon Milton, who on his part had twitted Salmasius with having been complimented by the exiled King with a purse of 100 Jacobuses for his performance. The one insinuation was as false as the other. Charles II. was too poor to offer more than thanks. Milton was too proud to receive for defending his country what the Parliament was willing to pay. Sir Peter Wentworth, of Lillingston Lovell, in Oxfordshire, left in his will 100*l.* to Milton for his book against Salmasius. But this was long after the Restoration, and Milton did not live to receive the legacy.

Instead of receiving an honorarium for his *Defence of the English People*, Milton had paid for it a sacrifice for which money could not compensate him. His eyesight, though quick, as he was a proficient with the rapier, had never been strong. His constant headaches, his late study, and (thinks Phillips) his perpetual tampering with physic to preserve his sight, concurred to bring the calamity upon him. It had been steadily coming on for a dozen years before, and about 1650 the sight of the left eye was gone. He was warned by his doctor that if he persisted in using the remaining eye for book-work, he would lose that too. "The choice lay before me," Milton writes in the *Second Defence*, "between dereliction of a

supreme duty and loss of eyesight; in such a case I could not listen to the physician, not if Æsculapius himself had spoken from his sanctuary; I could not but obey that inward monitor, I know not what, that spake to me from heaven. I considered with myself that many had purchased less good with worse ill, as they who give their lives to reap only glory, and I thereupon concluded to employ the little remaining eyesight I was to enjoy in doing this, the greatest service to the common weal it was in my power to render."

It was about the early part of the year 1652 that the calamity was consummated. At the age of forty-three he was in total darkness. The deprivation of sight, one of the severest afflictions of which humanity is capable, falls more heavily on the man whose occupation lies among books, than upon others. He who has most to lose, loses most. To most persons books are but an amusement, an interlude between the hours of serious occupation. The scholar is he who has found the key to knowledge, and knows his way about in the world of printed books. To find this key, to learn the map of this country, requires a long apprenticeship. This is a point few men can hope to reach much before the age of forty. Milton had attained it only to find fruition snatched from him. He had barely time to spell one line in the book of wisdom, before, like the wizard's volume in romance, it was hopelessly closed against him for ever. Any human being is shut out by loss of sight from accustomed pleasures, the scholar is shut out from knowledge. Shut out at forty-three, when his great work was not even begun! He consoles himself with the fancy that in his pamphlet, the *Defensio*, he had done a great work (*quanta maxima quivi*) for his country. This poor delusion helped him doubtless to

support his calamity. He could not foresee that, in less than ten years, the great work would be totally annihilated, his pamphlet would be merged in the obsolete mass of civil war tracts, and the *Defensio*, on which he had expended his last year of eyesight, only mentioned because it had been written by the author of *Paradise Lost*.

The nature of Milton's disease is not ascertainable from the account he has given of it. In the well-known passage of *Paradise Lost*, iii. 25, he hesitates between amaurosis (drop serene) and cataract (suffusion)

> So thick a drop serene hath quench'd their orbs,
> Or dim suffusion veil'd.

A medical friend referred to by Professor Alfred Stern, tells him that some of the symptoms are more like glaucoma. Milton himself has left such an account as a patient ignorant of the anatomy of the organ could give. It throws no light on the nature of the malady. But it is characteristic of Milton that even his affliction does not destroy his solicitude about his personal appearance. The taunts of his enemies about "the lack-lustre eye, guttering with prevalent rheum" did not pass unfelt. In his *Second Defence* Milton informs the world that his eyes "are externally uninjured. They shine with an unclouded light, just like the eyes of one whose vision is perfect. This is the only point in which I am, against my will, a hypocrite." The vindication appears again in Sonnet XIX. "These eyes, though clear To outward view of blemish or of spot." In later years, when the exordium of Book iii. of *Paradise Lost* was composed, in the pathetic story of his blindness, this little touch of vanity has disappeared, as incompatible with the solemn dignity of the occasion.

CHAPTER X.

MILTON AND MORUS—THE SECOND DEFENCE—THE DEFENCE FOR HIMSELF.

Civil history is largely a history of wars between states, and literary history is no less the record of quarrels in print between jealous authors. Poets and artists, more susceptible than practical men, seem to live a life of perpetual wrangle. The history of these petty feuds is not healthy intellectual food, it is at best amusing scandal. But these quarrels of authors do not degrade the authors in our eyes, they only show them to be, what we knew, as vain, irritable, and opinionative as other men. Ben Jonson, Dryden, Pope, Voltaire, Rousseau, belabour their enemies, and we see nothing incongruous in their doing so. It is not so when the awful majesty of Milton descends from the empyrean throne of contemplation to use the language of the gutter or the fish-market. The bathos is unthinkable. The universal intellect of Bacon shrank to the paltry pursuit of place. The disproportion between the intellectual capaciousness and the moral aim jars upon the sense of fitness, and the name of Bacon, "wisest, meanest," has passed into a proverb. Milton's fall is far worse. It is not here a union of grasp of mind with an

ignoble ambition, but the plunge of the moral nature from the highest heights to that despicable region vulgar scurrility and libel, which is below the level average gentility and education. The name of Milton synonym for sublimity. He has endowed our langu with the loftiest and noblest poetry it possesses, and same man is found employing speech for the most unwort purpose to which it can be put, that of defaming a vilifying a personal enemy, and an enemy so mean th barely to have been mentioned by Milton had been a honour to him. In Salmasius, Milton had at least been measuring his Latin against the Latin of the first classicist of the age. In Alexander Morus he wreaked august periods of Roman eloquence upon a vagabond preacher, of chance fortunes and tarnished reputation, a *græculus esuriens*, who appeared against Milton by the turn of accidents, and not as the representative of the opposite principle. In crushing Morus, Milton could not beguile himself with the idea that he was serving a cause.

In 1652 our country began to reap the fruits of the costly efforts it had made to obtain good government. A central authority was at last established, stronger than any which had existed since Elisabeth, and one which extended over Scotland and Ireland, no less than over England. The ecclesiastical and dynastic aims of the Stuart monarchy had been replaced by a national policy, which the interests of the people of Great Britain sprang the first place. The immediate consequence of this ion of vigour and patriotism, in the government, was the f-assertion of England as a commercial, and therefore a naval power. This awakened spirit of conscious ngth meant war with the Dutch, who while England pursuing ecclesiastical ends, had possessed them

of the trade of the world. War accordingly broke out early in 1652. Even before it came to real fighting, the war of pamphlets had recommenced. The prohibition of Salmasius' *Defensio regia* annulled itself as a matter of course, and Salmasius was free to prepare a second *Defensio* in answer to Milton. For the most vulnerable point of the new English Commonwealth, was through the odium excited on the continent against regicide. And the quarter from which the monarchical pamphlets were hurled against the English republic, was the press of the republic of the United Provinces, the country which had set the first example of successful rebellion against its lawful prince.

Before Salmasius' reply was ready, there was launched from the Hague, in March, 1652, a virulent royalist piece in Latin, under the title of *Regii sanguinis clamor ad cœlum* (Cry of the King's blood to Heaven against the English parricides). Its 160 pages contained the usual royalist invective in a rather common style of hyperbolical declamation, such as that "in comparison of the execution of Charles I., the guilt of the Jews in crucifying Christ was as nothing." Exaggerated praises of Salmasius were followed by scurrilous and rabid abuse of Milton. In the style of the most shameless Jesuit lampoon, the *Amphitheatrum* or the *Scaliger hypobolimæus*, and with Jesuit tactics, every odious crime is imputed to the object of the satire, without regard to truth or probability. Exiles are proverbially credulous, and it is likely enough that the gossip of the English refugees at the Hague was much employed in improving or inventing stories about the man, who had dared to answer the royalist champion in Latin as good as his own. Salmasius in his *Defensio* had employed these stories, distorting the events of Milton's

life to discredit him. But for the author of the *Clamor* there was no such excuse, for the book was composed in England, by an author living in Oxford and London, who had every opportunity for informing himself accurately of the facts about Milton's life and conversation. He chose rather to heap up at random the traditional vocabulary of defamation, which the Catholic theologians had employed for some generations past, as their best weapon against their adversaries. In these infamous productions, hatched by celibate pedants in the foul atmosphere of the Jesuit colleges, the gamut of charges always ranges from bad grammar to unnatural crime. The only circumstance which can be alleged in mitigation of the excesses of the *Regii sanguinis clamor* is that Milton had provoked the onfall by his own violence. He who throws dirt must expect that dirt will be thrown back at him, and when it comes to mud-throwing, the blackguard has, as it is right that he should have, the best of it.

The author of the *Clamor* was Peter Du Moulin, a son of the celebrated French Calvinist preacher of the same name. The author not daring to entrust his pamphlet to an English press, had sent it over to Holland, where it was printed under the supervision of Alexander Morus. This Morus (More or Moir) was of Scottish parentage, but born (1616) at Castres, where his father was principal of the Protestant college. Morus fitted the *Clamor* with a preface, in which Milton was further reviled, and styled a "monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademtum." The secret of the authorship was strictly kept, and Morus having been known to be concerned in the publication, was soon transformed in public belief into the author. So it was reported to Milton, and so Milton believed. He nursed his wrath, and took two years to

meditate his blow. He caused inquiries to be made into Morus's antecedents. It happened that Morus's conduct had been wanting in discretion, especially in his relations with women. He had been equally imprudent in his utterances on some of the certainties of Calvinistic divinity. It was easy to collect any amount of evidence under both these heads. The system of kirk discipline offered a ready-made machinery of espionage and delation. The standing jest of the fifteenth century on the "governante" of the curé was replaced, in Calvinistic countries, by the anxiety of every minister to detect his brother minister in any intimacy upon which a scandalous construction could be put.

Morus endeavoured, through every channel at his command, to convince Milton that he was not the author of the *Clamor*. He could have saved himself by revealing the real author, who was lurking all the while close to Milton's elbow, and whose safety depended on Morus' silence. This high-minded respect for another's secret is more to Morus' honour, than any of the petty gossip about him is to his discredit. He had nothing to offer, therefore, but negative assurances, and mere denial weighed nothing with Milton, who was fully convinced that Morus lied from terror. Milton's *Defensio Secunda* came out in May, 1654. In this piece (written in Latin) Morus is throughout assumed to be the author of the *Clamor*, and as such is pursued through many pages in a strain of invective, in which banter is mingled with ferocity. The Hague tittle-tattle about Morus's love-affairs is set forth in the pomp of Milton's loftiest Latin. Sonorous periods could hardly be more disproportioned to their material content. To have kissed a girl is painted as the blackest of crimes. The sublime and the ridiculous are here

blended without the step between. Milton descends even to abuse the publisher, Vlac, who had officially signed his name to Morus's preface. The mixture of fanatical choler and grotesque jocularity, in which he rolls forth his charges of incontinence against Morus, and of petty knavery against Vlac, is only saved from being unseemly by being ridiculous. The comedy is complete when we remember that Morus had not written the *Clamor*, nor Vlac the preface. Milton's rage blinded him; he is mad Ajax castigating innocent sheep instead of Achæans.

The Latin pamphlets are indispensable to a knowledge of Milton's disposition. We see in them his grand disdain of his opponents, reproducing the concentrated intellectual scorn of the Latin Persius; his certainty of the absolute justice of his own cause, and the purity of his own motives. This lofty cast of thought is combined with an eagerness to answer the meanest taunts. The intense subjectivity of the poet breaks out in these paragraphs, and while he should be stating the case of the republic, he holds Europe listening to an account of himself, his accomplishments, his studies and travels, his stature, the colour of his eyes, his skill in fencing, &c. These egoistic utterances must have seemed to Milton's contemporaries to be intrusive and irrelevant vanity. *Paradise Lost* was not as yet, and to the Council of State Milton was, what he was to Whitelocke, "a blind man who wrote Latin." But these paragraphs, in which he talks of himself, are to us the only living fragments out of many hundred worthless pages.

To the *Defensio Secunda* there was of course a reply by Morus. It was entitled *Fides Publica*, because it was largely composed of testimonials to character. When one priest charges another with unchastity, the world

looks on and laughs. But it is no laughing matter to the defendant in such an action. He can always bring exculpatory evidence, and in spite of any evidence he is always believed to be guilty. The effect of Milton's furious denunciation of Morus had been to damage his credit in religious circles, and to make mothers of families shy of allowing him to visit at their houses.

Milton might have been content with a victory which, as Gibbon said of his own, "over such an antagonist was a sufficient humiliation." Milton's magnanimity was no match for his irritation. He published a rejoinder to Morus's *Fides Publica*, reiterating his belief that Morus was author of the *Clamor*, but that it was no matter whether he was or not, since by publishing the book, and furnishing it with a recommendatory preface, he had made it his own. The charges against Morus' character he reiterated, and strengthened by new "facts," which Morus's enemies had hastened to contribute to the budget of calumny. These imputations on character, mixed with insinuations of unorthodoxy, such as are ever rife in clerical controversy, Milton invests with the moral indignation of a prophet denouncing the enemies of Jehovah. He expends a wealth of vituperative Latin which makes us tremble, till we remember that it is put in motion to crush an insect.

This *Pro se defensio* (Defence for himself), appeared in August, 1655. Morus met it by a supplementary *Fides Publica*, and Milton, resolved to have the last word, met him by a *Supplement to the Defence*. The reader will be glad to hear that this is the end of the Morus controversy. We leave Milton's victim buried under the mountains of opprobrious Latin here heaped upon him—this "circumforaneus pharmacopola, vanissimus circulator, propudium hominis et prostibulum."

CHAPTER XI.

LATIN SECRETARYSHIP COMES TO AN END—MILTON'S FRIENDS.

It is no part of Milton's biography to relate the course of public events in these momentous years, merely because as Latin secretary he formulated the despatches of the Protector or of his Council, and because these Latin letters are incorporated in Milton's works. On the course of affairs Milton's voice had no influence, as he had no part in their transaction. Milton was the last man of whom a practical politician would have sought advice. He knew nothing of the temper of the nation, and treated all that opposed his own view with supreme disdain. On the other hand, idealist though he was, he does not move in the sphere of speculative politics, or count among those philosophic names, a few in each century, who have influenced, not action but thought. Accordingly his opinions have for us a purely personal interest. They are part of the character of the poet Milton, and do not belong to either world, of action or of mind.

The course of his political convictions up to 1651 has been traced in our narrative thus far. His breeding at

home, at school, at college, was that of a member of the Established Church, but of the Puritan and Calvinistic, not of the Laudian and Arminian, party within its pale. By 1641, we find that his Puritanism has developed into Presbyterianism; he desires, not to destroy the Church, but to reform it by abolishing government by bishops, and substituting the Scotch or Genevan discipline. When he wrote his *Reason of Church Government* (1642), he is still a royalist; not in the cavalier sense of a person attached to the reigning sovereign, or the Stuart family, but still retaining the belief of his age that monarchy in the abstract had somewhat of divine sanction. Before 1649, the divine right of monarchy, and the claim of Presbytery to be scriptural, have yielded in his mind to a wider conception of the rights of the man and the Christian. To use the party names of the time, Milton the Presbyterian has expanded into Milton the Independent. There is to be no State Church, and instead of a monarchy there is to be a commonwealth. Very soon the situation developes the important question how this commonwealth shall be administered—whether by a representative assembly, or by a picked council, or a single governor. This question was put to a test in the Parliament of 1654. The experiment of a representative assembly, begun in September 1654, broke down in January 1655. Before it was tried we find Milton in his *Second Defence*, in May 1654, recommending Cromwell to govern not by a Parliament, but by a council of officers, i. e. he is a commonwealth's man. Arrived at this point would Milton take his stand upon doctrinaire republicanism, and lose sight of liberty in the attempt to secure equality, as his friends Vane, Overton, Bradshaw would have done? Or would his idealist exultation sweep

him on into some one of the current fanaticisms, Leveller, Fifth Monarchy, or Muggletonian? Unpractical as he was, he was close enough to State affairs as Latin Secretary, to see that personal government by the Protector was, at the moment, the only solution. If the liberties that had been conquered by the sword were to be maintained, between levelling chaos on the one hand, and royalist reaction on the other, it was the Protector alone to whom those who prized liberty above party names could look. Accordingly Milton may be regarded from the year 1654 onwards as an Oliverian, though with particular reservations. He saw—it was impossible for a man in his situation not to see—the unavoidable necessity which forced Cromwell, at this moment, to undertake to govern without a representative assembly The political necessity of the situation was absolute, and all reasonable men who were embarked in the cause felt it to be so.

Through all these stages Milton passed in the space of twenty years—Church-Puritan, Presbyterian, Royalist, Independent, Commonwealth's man, Oliverian. These political phases were not the acquiescence of a placeman, or indifferentist, in mutations for which he does not care; still less were they changes either of party or of opinion. Whatever he thought, Milton thought and felt intensely, and expressed emphatically; and even his enemies could not accuse him of a shadow of inconsistency or wavering in his principles. On the contrary, tenacity, or persistence of idea, amounted in him to a serious defect of character. A conviction once formed dominated him, so that, as in the controversy with Morus, he could not be persuaded that he had made a mistake. No mind, the history of which we have an opportunity of intimately studying,

could be more of one piece and texture than was that of Milton from youth to age. The names, which we are obliged to give to his successive political stages, do not indicate shades of colour adopted from the prevailing political ground, but the genuine development of the public consciousness of Puritan England repeated in an individual. Milton moved forward, not because Cromwell and the rest advanced, but with Cromwell and the rest. We may perhaps describe the motive force as a passionate attachment to personal liberty, liberty of thought and action. This ideal force working in the minds of a few, "those worthies which are the soul of that enterprise" (*Tenure of Kings*), had been the mainspring of the whole revolution. The Levellers, Quakers, Fifth Monarchy men, and the wilder Anabaptist sects, only showed the workings of the same idea in men, whose intellects had not been disciplined by education or experience. The idea of liberty, formulated into a doctrine, and bowed down to as a holy creed, made some of its best disciples, such as Harrison and Overton, useless at the most critical juncture. The party of anti-Oliverian republicans, the Intransigentes, became one of the greatest difficulties of the Government. Milton, with his idealism, his thoroughness, and obstinate persistence, was not unlikely to have shipwrecked upon the same rock. He was saved by his constancy to the principle of religious liberty, which was found with the party that had destroyed the King because he would not be ruled by a Parliament, while in 1655 it supported the Protector in governing without a Parliament. Supreme authority in itself was not Cromwell's aim; he used it only to secure the fulfilment of those ideas of religious liberty, civil order, and Protestant ascendancy in Europe, which filled his whole soul. To

Milton, as to Cromwell, forms, whether of worship or government, were but means to an end, and were to be changed whenever expediency might require.

In 1655, then, Milton was an Oliverian, but with reservations. The most important of these reservations regarded the relation of the state to the church. Cromwell never wholly dropped the scheme of a national church. It was, indeed, to be as comprehensive as possible; Episcopacy was pulled down, Presbytery was not set up, but individual ministers might be Episcopalian or Presbyterian in sentiment, provided they satisfied a certain standard, intelligible enough to that generation, of "godliness." Here Milton seems to have remained throughout upon the old Independent platform; he will not have the civil power step over its limits into the province of religion at all. Many matters, in which the old prelatic church had usurped upon the domain of the state, should be replaced under the secular authority. But the spiritual region was matter of conscience, and not of external regulation.

A further reservation which Milton would make related to endowments, or the maintenance of ministers. The Protectorate, and the constitution of 1657, maintained an established clergy in the enjoyment of tithes or other settled stipends. Nothing was more abhorrent to Milton's sentiment than state payment in religious things. The minister who receives such pay becomes a state pensioner, "a hireling." The law of tithes is a Jewish law, repealed by the Gospel, under which the minister is only maintained by the freewill offerings of the congregation to which he ministers. This antipathy to hired preachers was one of Milton's earliest convictions. It thrusts itself, rather importunately, into *Lycidas* (1636), and reappears

in the Sonnet to Cromwell (*Sonnet* XVII., 1652), before it dogmatically expounded in the pamphlet, *Consideratio touching means to remove Hirelings out of the Chur* (1659). Of the two corruptions of the church by tl secular power, one by force, the other by pay, Milt regards the last as the most dangerous. "Under for though no thank to the forcers, true religion ofttimes be thrives and flourishes; but the corruption of teache most commonly the effect of hire, is the very bane truth in them who are so corrupted." Nor can we t this aversion to a salaried ministry, with being a mon mania of sect. It is essentially involved in the concepti of religion as a spiritual state, a state of grace. A soul this state can only be ministered to by a brother in a li frame of mind. To assign a place with a salary, is to off a pecuniary inducement to simulate this qualificatio This principle may be wrong, but it is not unreasonab It is the very principle on which the England of our d has decided against the endowment of science. T endowment of the church was to Milton the poison religion, and in so thinking he was but true to his co ception of religion. Cromwell, whatever may have be his speculative opinions, decided in favour of a sta endowment, upon the reasons, or some of them, whi have moved modern statesmen to maintain church est blishments.

With whatever reservations, Milton was an Oliveria Supporting the Protector's policy, he admired his condu and has recorded his admiration in the memorable sonn XII. How the Protector thought of Milton, or ev that he knew him at all, there remains no eviden Napoleon said of Corneille that, if he had lived in h day, he would have made him his first ministe

Milton's ideas were not such as could have value in the eyes of a practical statesman. Yet Cromwell was not always taking advice, or discussing business. He, who could take a liking for the genuine inwardness of the enthusiast George Fox, might have been expected to appreciate equal unworldliness, joined with culture and reading, in Milton. "If," says Neal, "there was a man in England who excelled in any faculty or science, the Protector would find him out and reward him." But the excellence which the Protector prized was aptness for public employment, and this was the very quality in which Milton was deficient.

The poverty of Milton's state letters has been often remarked. Whenever weighty negotiations are going on, other pens than his are employed. We may ascribe this to his blindness. Milton could only dictate, and therefore everything entrusted to him must pass through an amanuensis, who might blab. One exception to the commonplace character of the state papers there is. The massacre of the Vaudois by their own sovereign, Charles Emanuel II., Duke of Savoy, excited a thrill of horror in England greater than the massacres of Scio or of Batak roused in our time. For in Savoy it was not humanity only that was outraged, it was a deliberate assault of the Papal half of Europe upon an outpost of the Protestant cause.

One effect of the Puritan revolution had been to alter entirely the foreign policy of England. By nature, by geographical position, by commercial occupations, and the free spirit of the natives, these islands were marked out to be members of the northern confederacy of progressive and emancipated Europe. The foreign policy of Elizabeth had been steady adhesion to this

law of nature. The two first Stuarts, coquetting with semi-catholicism at home, had leaned with all the weight of the crown and of government towards catholic connexions. The country had always offered a vain resistance; the Parliament of 1621 had been dismissed for advising James to join the continental protestants against Spain. It was certain, therefore, that when the government became Puritan, its foreign policy would again become that of Elisabeth. This must have been the case even if Cromwell had not been there. He saw not only that England must be a partner in the general protestant interest, but that it fell to England to make the combination and to lead it. He acted in this with his usual decision. He placed England in her natural antagonism to Spain; he made peace with the Dutch; he courted the friendship of the Swiss Cantons, and the alliance of the Scandinavian and German Princes; and to France, which had a divided interest, he made advantageous offers provided the Cardinal would disconnect himself from the ultramontane party.

It was in April 1655, that the Vaudois atrocities suddenly added the impulse of religious sympathy to the permanent gravitation of the political forces. In all catholic countries the Jesuits had by this time made themselves masters of the councils of the princes. The aim of Jesuit policy in the seventeenth century was nothing less than the entire extirpation of protestantism and protestants in the countries which they ruled. The inhabitants of certain Piedmontese valleys had held from time immemorial, and long before Luther, tenets and forms of worship very like those to which the German reformers had sought to bring back the church. The Vaudois were wretchedly poor, and had been incessantly

the objects of aggression and persecution. In January 1655, a sudden determination was taken by the Turin government to make them conform to the catholic religion by force. The whole of the inhabitants of three valleys were ordered to quit the country within three days, under pain of death and confiscation of goods, unless they would become, or undertake to become, catholic. They sent their humble remonstrances to the court of Turin against this edict. The remonstrances were disregarded, and military execution was ordered. On April 17, 1655, the soldiers, recruits from all countries—the Irish are specially mentioned—were let loose upon the unarmed population. Murder and rape and burning are the ordinary incidents of military execution. These were not enough to satisfy the ferocity of the catholic soldiery, who revelled for many days in the infliction of all that brutal lust or savage cruelty can suggest to men.

It was nearly a month before the news reached England. A cry of horror went through the country, and Cromwell said it came "as near his heart as if his own nearest and dearest had been concerned." A day of humiliation was appointed, large collections were made for the sufferers, and a special envoy was despatched to remonstrate with the Duke of Savoy. Cardinal Mazarin, however, seeing the importance which the Lord Protector would acquire by taking the lead on this occasion, stepped in, and patched up a hasty arrangement, the treaty of Pignerol, by which some sort of fallacious protection was ostensibly secured to the survivors of the massacre.

All the despatches in this business were composed by Milton. But he only found the words; especially in the letter to the Duke of Savoy, the tone of which is more moderate than we should have expected,

ing that Blake was in the Mediterranean, and master of the coasts of the Duke's dominions. It is impossible to extract from these letters any characteristic trait, unless it is from the speech which the envoy, Morland, was instructed to deliver at Turin, in which it is said that all the Neros of all ages had never contrived inhumanities so atrocious, as what had taken place in the Vaudois valleys. Thus restricted in his official communications, Milton gave vent to his personal feelings on the occasion in the well-known sonnet (XVIII.) "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold."

It has been already said that there remains no trace of any personal intercourse between Milton and Cromwell. He seems to have remained equally unknown to, or unregarded by, the other leading men in the Government or the Council. It is vain to conjecture the cause of this general neglect. Some have found it in the coldness with which Milton regarded, parts at least of, the policy of the Protectorate. Others refer it to the haughty nature of the man, who will neither ask a favour, nor make the first advances towards intimacy. This last supposition is nearer the truth than the former. An expression he used in a private letter may be cited in its support. Writing to Peter Heimbach in 1657, to excuse himself from giving him a recommendation to the English ambassador in Holland, he says: "I am sorry that I am not able to do this; I have very little acquaintance with those in power, inasmuch as I keep very much to my own house, and prefer to do so." Something may also be set down to the character of the Puritan leaders, alien to all poetry, and knowing no books but the Bible.

The mental isolation in which the great poet lived his

life, is a remarkable feature of his biography. It was not only after the Restoration that he appears lonely and friendless; it was much the same during the previous period of the Parliament and the Protectorate. Just at one time, about 1641, we hear from our best authority, Phillips, of his cultivating the society of men of his own age, and "keeping a gawdy-day," but this only once in three weeks or a month, with "two gentlemen of Gray's Inn." He had, therefore, known what it was to be sociable. But the general tenour of his life was other; proud, reserved, self-contained, repellent; brooding over his own ideas, not easily admitting into his mind the ideas of others. It is indeed an erroneous estimate of Milton to attribute to him a hard or austere nature. He had all the quick sensibility which belongs to the poetic temperament, and longed to be loved that he might love again. But he had to pay the penalty of all who believe in their own ideas, in that their ideas come between them and the persons that approach them, and constitute a mental barrier which can only be broken down by sympathy. And sympathy for ideas is hard to find, just in proportion as those ideas are profound, far-reaching, the fruit of long study and meditation. Hence it was that Milton did not associate readily with his contemporaries, but was affable and instructive in conversation with young persons, and those who would approach him in the attitude of disciples. His daughter Deborah, who could tell *so little* about him, remembered that he was delightful company, the life of a circle, and that he was *so*, through a flow of subjects, and an unaffected cheerfulness and civility. I would interpret this testimony, the authenticity of which is indisputable, of his demeanour with the young, and those who were modest enough to

wait upon his utterances. His isolation from his coevals, and from those who offered resistance, was the necessary consequence of his force of character, and the moral tenacity which endured no encroachment on the narrow scheme of thought, over which it was incessantly brooding.

Though, as Johnson says, "his literature was immense," there was no humanity in it; it was fitted immovably into a scholastic frame-work. Hence it was no bond of sympathy between him and other men. We find him in no intimate relation with any of the contemporary men of learning, poets, or wits. From such of them as were of the cavalier party he was estranged by politics. That it was Milton's interposition which saved Davenant's life in 1651, even were the story better authenticated than it is, is not an evidence of intimacy. The three men most eminent for learning (in the usually received sense of the word) in England at that day were Selden (d. 1654), Gataker (d. 1654), and Archbishop Usher (d. 1656), all of whom were to be found in London. With none of the three is there any trace of Milton ever having had intercourse.

It is probable, but not certain, that it was at Milton's intercession that the Council proposed to subsidise Brian Walton in his great enterprise—the Polyglott Bible. This, the noblest monument of the learning of the Anglican Church, was projected and executed by the silenced clergy. Fifteen years of spoliation and humiliation thus bore richer fruit of learning than the two centuries of wealth and honour which have since elapsed. As Brian Walton had, at one time, been curate of Allhallows, Bread Street, Milton may have known him, and it has been inferred that by Twells' expression—"The Council of

state, before whom *some*, having *relation to them*, brought this business"—Milton is meant.

Not with John Hales, Cudworth, Whichcote, Nicholas Bernard, Meric Casaubon, nor with any of the men of letters who were churchmen, do we find Milton in correspondence. The interest of religion was more powerful than the interest of knowledge; and the author of *Eikonoklastes* must have been held in special abhorrence by the loyal clergy. The general sentiment of this party is expressed in Hacket's tirade, for which the reader is referred to his Life of Archbishop Williams.

From Presbyterians, such as Theophilus Gale or Baxter, Milton was equally separated by party. Of Hobbes, Milton's widow told Aubrey "that he was not of his acquaintance; that her husband did not like him at all, but would acknowledge him to be a man of great parts."

Owing to these circumstances, the circle of Milton's intimates contains few, and those undistinguished names. One exception there was. In Andrew Marvel Milton found one congenial spirit, incorruptible amid poverty, unbowed by defeat. Marvel was twelve years Milton's junior, and a Cambridge man (Trinity), like himself. He had had better training still, having been for two years an inmate of Nunappleton, in the capacity of instructor to Mary, only daughter of the great Lord Fairfax. In 1652, Milton had recommended Marvel for the appointment of assistant secretary to himself, now that he was partially disabled by his blindness. The recommendation was not effectual at the time, another man, Philip Meadows, obtaining the post. It was not till 1657, when Meadows was sent on a mission to Denmark, that Marvel became Milton's colleague. He remained attached to him to the last. It were to be wished that he had left some

reminiscences of his intercourse with the poet in his later years, some authentic notice of him in his prose letters, instead of a copy of verses, which attest, at least, his affectionate admiration for Milton's great epic, though they are a poor specimen of his own poetical efforts.

Of Marchmont Needham, and Samuel Hartlib mention has been already made. During the eight years of his sojourn in the house in Petty France, "he was frequently visited by persons of quality," says Phillips. The only name he gives is Lady Ranelagh. This lady, by birth a Boyle, sister of Robert Boyle, had placed first her nephew, and then her son, under Milton's tuition. Of an excellent understanding, and liberally cultivated, she sought Milton's society, and as he could not go to visit her, she went to him. There are no letters of Milton addressed to her, but he mentions her once as "a most superior woman," and when, in 1656, she left London for Ireland, he "grieves for the loss of the one acquaintance which was worth to him all the rest." These names, with that of Dr. Paget, exhaust the scanty list of Milton's intimates during this period.

To these older friends, however, must be added his former pupils, now become men, but remaining ever attached to their old tutor, seeing him often when in London, and when absent corresponding with him. With them he was "affable and instructive in conversation." Henry Lawrence, son of the President of Oliver's Council, and Cyriac Skinner, grandson of Chief Justice Coke, were special favourites. With these he would sometimes "by the fire help waste a sullen day;" and it was these two who called forth from him the only utterances of this time which are not solemn, serious, or sad. Sonnet XVI is a poetical invitation to Henry Lawrence, "of virtuous

father virtuous son," to a "neat repast," not without wine and song, to cheer the winter season. Besides these two, whose names are familiar to us through the Sonnets, there was Lady Ranelagh's son, Richard Jones, who went, in 1656, to Oxford, attended by his tutor, the German, Heinrich Oldenburg. We have two letters (Latin) addressed to Jones at Oxford, which are curious as showing that Milton was as dissatisfied with that university even after the reform, with Oliver Chancellor, and Owen Vice-Chancellor, as he had been with Cambridge.

His two nephews, also his pupils, must have ceased at a very early period to be acceptable either as friends or companions. They had both—but the younger brother, John, more decidedly than Edward—passed into the opposite camp. This is a result of the uncle's strict system of Puritan discipline, which will surprise no one who has observed that, in education, mind reacts against the pressure of will. The teacher who seeks to impose his views raises antagonists, and not disciples. The generation of young men who grew up under the Commonwealth were in intellectual revolt against the constraint of Puritanism, before they proceeded to political revolution against its authority. Long before the reaction embodied itself in the political fact of the Restoration, it had manifested itself in popular literature. The theatres were still closed by the police, but Davenant found a public in London to applaud an "entertainment by declamations and music, after the manner of the ancients" (1656). The press began timidly to venture on books of amusement, in a style of humour which seemed ribald and heathenish to the staid and sober covenanter. Something of the jollity and merriment of old Elizabethan days seemed to be in the air. But with a vast difference. Instead of "dally-

ing with the innocence of love," as in *England's Helicon* (1600), or *The Passionate Pilgrim*, the sentiment, crushed and maimed by unwise repression, found a less honest and less refined expression. The strongest and most universal of human passions when allowed freedom, light, and air, becomes poetic inspiration. The same passion coerced by police is but driven underground.

So it came to pass that, in these years, the Protector's Council of state was much exercised by attempts of the London press to supply the public, weary of sermons, with some light literature of the class now (1879) known as facetious. On April 25, 1656, the august body which had upon its hands the government of three kingdoms and the protection of the protestant interest militant throughout Europe, could find nothing better to do than to take into consideration a book entitled *Sportive Wit, or The Muse's Merriment.* Sad to relate, the book was found to contain "much lascivious and profane matter." And the editor?—no other than John Phillips, Milton's youngest nephew! It is as if nature, in reasserting herself, had made deliberate selection of its agent. The pure poet of *Comus*, the man who had publicly boasted his chastity, had trained up a pupil to become the editor of an immodest drollery! Another and more original production of John Phillips, the *Satyr against Hypocrites*, was an open attack, with mixed banter and serious indignation, on the established religion. "It affords," says Godwin, "unequivocal indication of the company now kept by the author with cavaliers, and *bon vivans*, and demireps, and men of ruined fortunes." Edward Phillips, the elder brother, followed suit with the *Mysteries of Love and Eloquence* (1658), a book, according to Godwin, "entitled to no insignificant rank among

the multifarious productions issued from the press, to debauch the manners of the nation, and to bring back the King." Truly, a man's worst vexations come to him from his own relations. Milton had the double annoyance of the public exposure before the Council of State, and the private reflection on the failure of his own system of education.

The homage which was wanting to the prophet in his own country was more liberally tendered by foreigners. Milton, it must be remembered, was yet only known in England as the pamphleteer of strong republican, but somewhat eccentric, opinions. On the continent he was the answerer of Salmasius, the vindicator of liberty against despotic power. "Learned foreigners of note," Phillips tells us, "could not part out of this city without giving a visit" to his uncle. Aubrey even exaggerates this flocking of the curious, so far as to say that some came over into England only to see Oliver Protector and John Milton. That Milton had more than he liked of these sightseers, who came to look at him when he could not see them, we can easily believe. Such visitors would of course be from protestant countries. Italians, though admiring his elegant Latin, had "disliked him on account of his too severe morals." A glimpse, and no more than a glimpse, of the impression such visitors could carry away, we obtain in a letter written, in 1651, by a Nüremberg pastor, Christoph Arnold, to a friend at home:—"The strenuous defender of the new *régime*, Milton, enters readily into conversation; his speech is pure, his written style very pregnant. He has committed himself to a harsh, not to say unjust, criticism of the old English divines, and of their Scripture commentaries, which are truly learned, be witness the genius of learning himself!"

It must not be supposed from this that Milton had discoursed with Arnold on the English divines. The allusion is to that onfall upon the reformers, Cranmer, Latimer, &c., which had escaped from Milton's pen in 1642 to the great grief of his friends. If the information of a dissenting minister, one Thomas Bradbury, who professed to derive it from Jeremiah White, one of Oliver's chaplains, may be trusted, Milton "was allowed by the Parliament a weekly table for the entertainment of foreign ministers and persons of learning, such especially as came from protestant states, which allowance was also continued by Cromwell."

Such homage, though it may be a little tiresome, may have gratified for the moment the political writer, but it would not satisfy the poet who was dreaming of an immortality of far other fame—

> Two equal'd with me in fate,
> So were I equal'd with them in renown.

And to one with Milton's acute sensibility, yearning for sympathy and love, dependent, through his calamity, on the eyes, as on the heart, of others, his domestic interior was of more consequence than outside demonstrations of respect. Four years after the death of his first wife he married again. We know nothing more of this second wife, Catharine Woodcock, than what may be gathered from the Sonnet xix, in which he commemorated his "late espoused saint," in whose person "love, sweetness, goodness shin'd." After only fifteen months union she died (1658), after having given birth to a daughter, who lived only a few months. Milton was again alone.

His public functions as Latin Secretary had been con-

tracted within narrow limits by his blindness. The heavier part of the duties had been transferred to others, first to Weckherlin, then to Philip Meadows, and lastly to Andrew Marvel. The more confidential diplomacy Thurloe reserved for his own cabinet. But Milton continued up to the last to be occasionally called upon for a Latin epistle. On September 3, 1658, passed away the master-mind which had hitherto compelled the jarring elements in the nation to co-exist together, and chaos was let loose. Milton retained and exercised his secretaryship under Richard Protector, and even under the restored Parliament. His latest Latin letter is of date May 16, 1659. He is entirely outside all the combinations and complications which filled the latter half of that year, after Richard's retirement in May. It is little use writing to foreign potentates now, for, with one man's life, England has fallen from her lead in Europe, and is gravitating towards the catholic and reactionary powers, France or Spain. Milton, though he knows nothing more than one of the public, "only what it appears to us without doors," he says, will yet write about it. The habit of pamphleteering was on him, and he will write what no one will care to read. The stiff-necked commonwealth men, with their doctrinaire republicanism, were standing out for their constitutional ideas, blind to the fact that the royalists were all the while undermining the ground beneath the feet alike of Presbyterian and Independent, Parliament and army. The Greeks of Constantinople denouncing the Azymite, when Mohammed II. was forming his lines round the doomed city, were not more infatuated than these pedantic commonwealth men with their parliamentarianism when Charles II. was at Calais.

Not less inopportune than the public men of the party,

Milton chooses this time for inculcating his views on endowments. A fury of utterance was upon him, and he poured out, during the death-throes of the republic, pamphlet upon pamphlet, as fast as he could get them written to his dictation. These extemporised effusions betray in their style, hurry and confusion, the restlessness of a coming despair. The passionate enthusiasm of the early tracts is gone, and all the old faults, the obscurity, the inconsecutiveness, the want of arrangement, are exaggerated. In the *Ready Way* there is a monster sentence of thirty-nine lines, containing 336 words. Though his instincts were perturbed, he was unaware what turn things were taking. In February 1660, when all persons of ordinary information saw that the restoration of monarchy was certain, Milton knew it not, and put out a tract to show his countrymen a *Ready and easy way to establish a free Commonwealth*. With the same pertinacity with which he had adhered to his own assumption that Morus was author of the *Clamor*, he now refused to believe in the return of the Stuarts. Fast as his pen moved, events outstripped it, and he has to rewrite the *Ready and easy way* to suit their march. The second edition is overtaken by the Restoration, and it should seem was never circulated. Milton will ever "give advice to Sylla," and writes a letter of admonition to Monk, which, however, never reached either the press or Sylla.

The month of May 1660, put a forced end to his illusion. Before the 29th of that month he had fled from the house in Petty France, and been sheltered by a friend in the city. In this friend's house, in Bartholomew Close, he lay concealed till the passing of the Act of Oblivion, 29th August. Phillips says that he owed his

exemption from the vengeance which overtook so many of his friends, to Andrew Marvel, "who acted vigorously in his behalf, and made a considerable party for him." But in adding that "he was so far excepted as not to bear any office in the commonwealth," Phillips is in error. Milton's name does not occur in the Act. Pope used to tell that Davenant had employed his interest to protect a brother-poet, thus returning a similar act of generosity done to himself by Milton in 1650. Pope had this story from Betterton the actor. How far Davenant exaggerated to Betterton his own influence or his exertions, we cannot tell. Another account assigns the credit of the intervention to Secretary Morris and Sir Thomas Clarges. After all, it is probable that he owed his immunity to his insignificance and his harmlessness. The formality of burning two of his books by the hands of the hangman was gone through. He was also for some time during the autumn of 1660 in the custody of the serjeant-at-arms, for on 15th December, there is an entry in the Commons journals ordering his discharge. It is characteristic of Milton that, even in this moment of peril, he stood up for his rights, and refused to pay an overcharge, which the official thought he might safely exact from a rebel and a covenanter.

THIRD PERIOD. 1660–

CHAPTER XII.

BIOGRAPHICAL.—LITERARY OCCUPATION.—RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

Revolutions are of two kinds; they are either progressive or reactionary. A revolution of progress is often destructive, sweeping away much which should have been preserved. But such a revolution has a regenerating force; it renews the youth of a nation, and gives free play to its vital powers. Lost limbs are replaced by new. A revolution of reaction, on the other hand, is a benumbing influence, paralysing effort, and levelling character. In such a conservative revolution the mean, the selfish, and the corrupt come to the top; man seeks ease and enjoyment rather than duty; virtue, honour, patriotism, and disinterestedness disappear altogether from a society which has ceased to believe in them.

The Restoration of 1660 was such a revolution. Complete and instantaneous inversion of the position of the two parties in the nation, it occasioned much individual hardship. But this was only the fortune of war, the necessary consequence of party ascendancy. The Restoration was much more than a triumph of the party of the royalists over that of the roundheads; it was the deathblow to

national aspiration, to all those aims which raise man above himself. It destroyed and trampled under foot his ideal. The Restoration was a moral catastrophe. It was not that there wanted good men among the churchmen, men as pious and virtuous as the Puritans whom they displaced. But the royalists came back as the party of reaction, reaction of the spirit of the world against asceticism, of self-indulgence against duty, of materialism against idealism. For a time virtue was a public laughing-stock, and the word "saint," the highest expression in the language for moral perfection, connoted everything that was ridiculous. I do not speak of the gallantries of Whitehall, which figure so prominently in the histories of the reign. Far too much is made of these, when they are made the scapegoat of the moralist. The style of court manners was a mere incident on the surface of social life. The national life was more profoundly tainted by the discouragement of all good men, which penetrated every shire and every parish, than by the distant reports of the loose behaviour of Charles II. Servility, meanness, venality, time-serving, and a disbelief in virtue diffused themselves over the nation like a pestilential miasma, the depressing influence of which was heavy, even upon those souls which individually resisted the poison. The heroic age of England had passed away, not by gradual decay, by imperceptible degeneration, but in a year, in a single day, like the winter's snow in Greece. It is for the historian to describe, and unfold the sources of this contagion. The biographer of Milton has to take note of the political change only as it affected the worldly circumstances of the man, the spiritual environment of the poet, and the springs of his inspiration.

The consequences of the Restoration to Milton's worldly

fortunes were disastrous. As a partisan he was necessarily involved in the ruin of his party. As a matter of course he lost his Latin secretaryship. There is a story that he was offered to be continued in it, and that when urged to accept the offer by his wife, he replied, "Thou art in the right; you, as other women, would ride in your coach; for me, my aim is to live and die an honest man." This tradition, handed on by Pope, is of doubtful authenticity. It is not probable that the man who had printed of Charles I. what Milton had printed, could have been offered office under Charles II. Even were court favour to be purchased by concessions, Milton was not the man to make them, or to belie his own antecedents, as Marchmont Needham, Dryden, and so many others did. Our wish for Milton is that he should have placed himself from the beginning above party. But he had chosen to be the champion of a party, and he loyally accepted the consequences. He escaped with life and liberty. The reaction, though barbarous in its treatment of its victims, was not bloodthirsty. Milton was already punished by the loss of his sight, and he was now mulcted in three-fourths of his small fortune. A sum of 2000*l.* which he had placed in government securities was lost, the restored monarchy refusing to recognise the obligations of the protectorate. He lost another like sum by mismanagement, and for want of good advice, says Phillips, or according to his granddaughter's statement, by the dishonesty of a money-scrivener. He had also to give up, without compensation, some property, valued at 60*l.* a year, which he had purchased when the estates of the Chapter of Westminster were sold. In the great fire, 1666, his house in Bread-street was destroyed. Thus, from easy circumstances, he was reduced, if not to destitution, at least to narrow means. He left at his death

1500*l*., which Phillips calls a considerable sum. And if he sold his books, one by one, during his lifetime, this was because, knowing their value, he thought he could dispose of them to greater advantage than his wife would be able to do.

But far outweighing such considerations as pecuniary ruin, and personal discomfort, was the shock which the moral nature felt from the irretrievable discomfiture of all the hopes, aims, and aspirations which had hitherto sustained and nourished his soul. In a few months the labour of twenty years was swept away without a trace of it being left. It was not merely a political defeat of his party, it was the total wreck of the principles, of the social and religious ideal, with which Milton's life was bound up. Others, whose convictions only had been engaged in the cause, could hasten to accommodate themselves to the new era, or even to transfer their services to the conqueror. But such flighty allegiance was not possible for Milton, who had embarked in the Puritan cause not only intellectual convictions, but all the generosity and ardour of his passionate nature. "I conceive myself to be," he had written in 1642, "not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded, and whereof I had declared myself openly to be the partaker." It was now in the moment of overthrow that Milton became truly great. "Wandellos im ewigen Ruin," he stood alone, and became the party himself. He took the only course open to him, turned away his thoughts from the political disaster, and directed the fierce enthusiasm which burned within, upon an absorbing poetic task. His outward hopes were blasted, and he returned with concentrated ardour to woo the muse, from whom he had so long truanted. The passion which seethes beneath the stately march of the verse in *Paradise Lost*, is not the

hopeless moan of despair, but the intensified fanaticism which defies misfortune to make it "bate one jot of heart or hope." The grand loneliness of Milton after 1668, "is reflected in his three great poems by a sublime independence of human sympathy, like that with which mountains fascinate and rebuff us" (*Lowell*).

Late then, but not too late, Milton, at the age of fifty-two, fell back upon the rich resources of his own mind, upon poetical composition, and the study of good books, which he always asserted to be necessary to nourish and sustain a poet's imagination. Here he had to contend with the enormous difficulty of blindness. He engaged a kind of attendant to read to him. But this only sufficed for English books—imperfectly even for these—and the greater part of the choice, not extensive, library upon which Milton drew, was Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and the modern languages of Europe. In a letter to Heimbach, of date 1666, he complains pathetically of the misery of having to spell out, letter by letter, the Latin words of the epistle, to the attendant who was writing to his dictation. At last he fell upon the plan of engaging young friends, who occasionally visited him, to read to him and to write for him. In the precious volume of Milton MSS. preserved in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, six different hands have been distinguished. Who they were is not always known. But Phillips tells us that, "he had daily about him one or other to read to him; some persons of man's estate, who of their own accord greedily catch'd at the opportunity of being his reader, that they might as well reap the benefit of what they read to him, as oblige him by the benefit of their reading; others of younger years sent by their parents to the same end." Edward Phillips himself, who visited his uncle to the last, may

have been among the number, as much as his own engagements as tutor, first to the only son of John Evelyn, then in the family of the Earl of Pembroke, and finally to the Bennets, Lord Arlington's children, would permit him. Others of these casual readers were Samuel Barrow, body physician to Charles II., and Cyriac Skinner, of whom mention has been already made (above, p. 132).

To a blind man, left with three little girls, of whom the youngest was only eight at the Restoration, marriage seemed equally necessary for their sake as for his own. Milton consulted his judicious friend and medical adviser, Dr. Paget, who recommended to him Elizabeth Minshull, of a family of respectable position near Nantwich, in Cheshire. She was some distant relation of Paget, who must have felt the terrible responsibility of undertaking to recommend. She justified his selection. The marriage took place in February 1663, and during the remaining eleven years of his life, the poet was surrounded by the thoughtful attentions of an active and capable woman. There is but scanty evidence as to what she was like, either in person or character. Aubrey, who knew her, says she was "a gent. (? genteel) person, (of) a peaceful and agreeable humour." Newton, Bishop of Bristol, who wrote in 1749, had heard that she was "a woman of a most violent spirit, and a hard mother-in-law to his children." It is certain that she regarded her husband with great veneration, and studied his comfort. Mary Fisher, a maidservant in the house, deposed that at the end of his life, when he was sick and infirm, his wife having provided something for dinner she thought he would like, he "spake to his said wife these or like words, as near as this deponent can remember: 'God have mercy, Betty, I see thou wilt perform according to thy promise, in providing

me such dishes as I think fit while I live, and when I die thou knowest I have left thee all.'" There is no evidence that his wife rendered him literary assistance. Perhaps, as she looked so thoroughly to his material comfort, her function was held, by tacit agreement, to end there.

As casual visitors, or volunteer readers, were not always in the way, and a hired servant who could not spell Latin was of very restricted use, it was not unnatural that Milton should look to his daughters, as they grew up, to take a share in supplying his voracious demand for intellectual food. Anne, the eldest, though she had handsome features, was deformed and had an impediment in her speech, which made her unavailable as a reader. The other two, Mary and Deborah, might now have been of inestimable service to their father, had their dispositions led them to adapt themselves to his needs, and the circumstances of the house. Unfortunate it was for Milton, that his biblical views on the inferiority of woman had been reduced to practice in the bringing up of his own daughters. It cannot indeed be said that the poet whose imagination created the Eve of *Paradise Lost*, regarded woman as the household drudge, existing only to minister to man's wants. Of all that men have said of women nothing is more loftily conceived than the well-known passage at the end of Book viii.:—

When I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems,
And in herself complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded; wisdom in discourse with her
Loses discountenanc'd, and like folly shows;
Authority and reason on her wait,
As one intended first, not after made

Bishop Newton thought that, in drawing Eve, Milton had in mind his third wife, because she had hair of the colour of Eve's "golden tresses." But Milton had never seen Elizabeth Minshull. If reality suggested any trait, physical or mental, of the Eve, it would certainly have been some woman seen in earlier years.

But wherever Milton may have met with an incarnation of female divinity such as he has drawn, it was not in his own family. We cannot but ask, how is it that one, whose type of woman is the loftiest known to English literature, should have brought up his own daughters on so different a model? Milton is not one of the false prophets, who turn round and laugh at their own enthusiasms, who say one thing in their verses, and another thing over their cups. What he writes in his poetry is what he thinks, what he means, and what he will do. But in directing the bringing up of his daughters, he put his own typical woman entirely on one side. His practice is framed on the principle that

> Nothing lovelier can be found
> In woman, than to study household good.
> *Paradise Lost*, IX. 233.

He did not allow his daughters to learn any language, saying with a gibe that one tongue was enough for a woman. They were not sent to any school, and had some sort of teaching at home from a mistress. But in order to make them useful in reading to him, their father was at the pains to train them to read aloud in five or six languages,

of none of which they understood one word. When we think of the time and labour which must have been expended to teach them to do this, it must occur to us that a little more labour would have sufficed to teach them so much of one or two of the languages, as would have made their reading a source of interest and improvement to themselves. This Milton refused to do. The consequence was, as might have been expected, the occupation became so irksome to them, that they rebelled against it. In the case of one of them, Mary, who was like her mother in person, and took after her in other respects, this restiveness passed into open revolt. She first resisted, then neglected, and finally came to hate, her father. When some one spoke in her presence of her father's approaching marriage, she said "that was no news to hear of his wedding; but if she could hear of his death, that was something." She combined with Anne, the eldest daughter, "to counsel his maidservant to cheat him in his marketings." They sold his books without his knowledge. "They made nothing of deserting him," he was often heard to complain. They continued to live with him five or six years after his marriage. But at last the situation became intolerable to both parties, and they were sent out to learn embroidery in gold or silver, as a means of obtaining their livelihood. Deborah, the youngest, was included in the same arrangement, though she seems to have been more helpful to her father, and to have been at one time his principal reader. Aubrey says that he "taught her Latin, and that she was his amanuensis." She even spoke of him when she was old—she lived to be seventy-four—with some tenderness. She was once, in 1725, shown Faithorne's crayon drawing of the poet, without being told for whom it was intended. She immediately exclaimed,

"O Lord! that is the picture of my father!" and stroking down the hair of her forehead, added, "Just so my father wore his hair."

One of Milton's volunteer readers, and one to whom we owe the most authentic account of him in his last years, was a young Quaker, named Thomas Ellwood. Milton's Puritanism had been all his life slowly gravitating in the direction of more and more liberty, and though he would not attach himself to any sect, he must have felt in no remote sympathy with men who repudiated state interference in religious matters, and disdained ordinances. Some such sympathy with the pure spirituality of the Quaker may have disposed Milton favourably towards Ellwood. The acquaintance once begun, was cemented by mutual advantage. Milton, besides securing an intelligent reader, had a pleasure in teaching; and Ellwood, though the reverse of humble, was teachable from desire to expand himself. Ellwood took a lodging near the post, and went to him every day, except "first-day," in the afternoon, to read Latin to him.

Milton's frequent change of abode has been thought indicative of a restless temperament, seeking escape from petty miseries by change of scene. On emerging from hiding, or escaping from the serjeant-at-arms in 1660, he lived for a short time in Holborn, near Red Lion Square. From this he removed to Jewin Street, and moved again, on his marriage, in 1662, to the house of Millington, the bookseller, who was now beginning business, but who, before his death in 1704, had accumulated the largest stock of second-hand books to be found in London. His last remove was to a house in a newly-created row facing the Artillery-ground, on the site of the west side of what is now called Bunhill Row. This was his abode from his

marriage till his death, nearly twelve years, a longer stay than he had made in any other residence. This is the house which must be associated with the poet of *Paradise Lost*, as it was here that the poem was in part written, and wholly revised and finished. But the Bunhill Row house is only producible by the imagination; every trace of it has long been swept away, though the name Milton Street, bestowed upon a neighbouring street, preserves the remembrance of the poet's connexion with the locality. Here "an ancient clergyman of Dorsetshire, Dr. Wright, found John Milton in a small chamber, hung with rusty green, sitting in an elbow-chair, and dressed neatly in black; pale, but not cadaverous, his hands and fingers gouty and with chalk-stones." At the door of this house, sitting in the sun, looking out upon the Artillery-ground, "in a grey coarse cloth coat," he would receive his visitors. On colder days he would walk for hours—three or four hours at a time, in his garden. A garden was a *sine qua non*, and he took care to have one to every house he lived in.

His habit in early life had been to study late into the night. After he lost his sight, he changed his hours, and retired to rest at nine. In summer he rose at four, in winter at five, and began the day with having the Hebrew Scriptures read to him. "Then he contemplated. At seven his man came to him again, and then read to him and wrote till dinner. The writing was as much as the reading" (Aubrey). Then he took exercise, either walking in the garden, or swinging in a machine. His only recreation, besides conversation, was music. He played the organ and the bass vi[illegible] organ most. Sometimes he wo[illegible] mself [illegible] ife to sing to him, thoug[illegible] il, [illegible] good voice. Then he w[illegible] six. [illegible] r six his fr[illegible] wo [illegible] th.

him till eight. At eight he went down to supper, usually olives or some light thing. He was very abstemious in his diet, having to contend with a gouty diathesis. He was not fastidious in his choice of meats, but content with anything that was in season, or easy to be procured. After supping thus sparingly, he smoked a pipe of tobacco, drank a glass of water, and then retired to bed. He was sparing in his use of wine. His Samson, who in this as in other things, is Milton himself, allays his thirst "from the clear milky juice."

Bed with its warmth and recumbent posture he found favourable to composition. At other times he would compose or prune his verses, as he walked in the garden, and then, coming in, dictate. His verse was not at the command of his will. Sometimes he would lie awake the whole night, trying but unable to make a single line. At other times lines flowed without premeditation "with a certain impetus and œstro." What was his season of inspiration is somewhat uncertain. In the elegy "To Spring," Milton says it was the spring which restored his poetic faculty. Phillips, however, says, "that his vein never flowed happily but from the autumnal equinox to the vernal," and that the poet told him this. Phillips' reminiscence is perhaps true at the date of *Paradise Lost*, when Milton's habits had changed from what they had been at twenty. Or we may agree with Toland, that Phillips has transposed the seasons, though preserving the fact of intermittent inspiration. What he composed at night, he dictated in the day, sitting obliquely in an elbow-chair, with his leg thrown over the arm. He would dictate forty lines, as it were in a breath, and then reduce them to half the number.

Milton's piety is admitted, even by his enemies; and it is a piety which oppresses his writings as well as his life.

The fact that a man, with a deep sense of religion, should not have attended any place of public worship, has given great trouble to Milton's biographers. And the principal biographers of this thorough-going nonconformist have been Anglican clergymen; Bishop Newton, Todd, Mitford; Dr. Johnson, more clerical than any cleric, being no exception. Mitford would give Milton a dispensation on the score of his age and infirmities. But the cause lay deeper. A profound apprehension of the spiritual world leads to a disregard of rites. To a mind so disposed externals become, first indifferent, then impedient. Ministration is officious intrusion. I do not find that Milton, though he wrote against paid ministers as hirelings, ever expressly formulated an opinion against ministers as such. But as has already been hinted, there grew up in him, in the last period of his life, a secret sympathy with the mode of thinking which came to characterise the Quaker sect. Not that Milton adopted any of their peculiar fancies. He affirms categorically the permissibility of oaths, of military service, and requires that women should keep silence in the congregation. But in negativing all means of arriving at truth except the letter of scripture interpreted by the inner light, he stood upon the same platform as the followers of George Fox.

Milton's latest utterance on theological topics is found in a tract published by him the year before his death, 1673. The piece is entitled *Of true religion, heresy, schism, toleration*; but its meagre contents do not bear out the comprehensiveness of the title. The only matter really discussed in the pages of the tract is the limit of toleration. The stamp of age is upon the style, which is more careless and incoherent even than usual. He has here dictated his extempore thoughts, without premeditation or revision, so that we have here a record of

Milton's habitual mind. Having watched him gradually emancipating himself from the contracted Calvinistic mould of the Bread-street home, it is disappointing to see that, at sixty-five, his development has proceeded no further than we here find. He is now willing to extend toleration to all sects who make the Scriptures *their sole rule of faith*. *Sects may misunderstand Scripture*, but to err is the condition of humanity, and will be pardoned by God, if diligence, prayer, and sincerity have been used. The sects named as to be tolerated are, Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Arians, Socinians, Arminians. They are to be tolerated to the extent of being allowed, on all occasions, to give account of their faith, by arguing, preaching in their several assemblies, writing and printing.

In this pamphlet the principle of toleration is flatly enunciated in opposition to the practice of the Restoration. But the principle is rested not on the statesman's ground of the irrelevancy of religious dispute to good government, but on the theological ground of the venial nature of religious error. And to permissible error there are very narrow limits; limits which exclude Catholics. For Milton will exclude Romanists from toleration, not on the statesman's ground of incivism, but on the *theologian's* ground of idolatry. All his antagonism in this tract is reserved for the Catholics. There is not a hint of discontent with the prelatry, once intolerable to him. Yet that prelatry was now scourging the nonconformists with scorpions instead of with whips, with its Act of Uniformity, its Conventicle Act, its Five-mile Act, filling the gaols with Milton's own friends and fellow-religionists. Several times, in these thirteen pages, he appeals to the practice or belief of the Church of England, once even calling it "our church."

This tract alone is sufficient refutation of an idle story that Milton died a Roman Catholic. The story is not well vouched, being hearsay three times removed. Milton's younger brother, Sir Christopher, is said to have said so at a dinner entertainment. If he ever did say as much, it must be set down to that peculiar form of credulity which makes perverts think that every one is about to follow their example. In Christopher Milton, "a man of no parts or ability, and a superstitious nature" (Toland), such credulity found a congenial soil.

The tract *Of true religion* was Milton's latest published work. But he was preparing for the press, at the time of his death, a more elaborate theological treatise. Daniel Skinner, a nephew of his old friend Cyriac, was serving as Milton's amanuensis in writing out a fair copy. Death came before a third of the work of correction, 196 pages out of 735, had been completed, of which the whole rough draft consists. The whole remained in Daniel Skinner's hands in 1674. Milton, though in his preface he is aware that his pages contain not a little which will be unpalatable to the reigning opinion in religion, would have dared publication, if he could have passed the censor. But Daniel Skinner, who was a Fellow of Trinity, and had a career before him, was not equally free. What could not appear in London, however, might be printed at Amsterdam. Skinner accordingly put both the theological treatise, and the epistles written by the Latin Secretary, into the hands of Daniel Elzevir. The English government getting intelligence of the proposed publication of the foreign correspondence of the Parliament and the Protector, interfered, and pressure was put upon Skinner, through the Master of Trinity, Isaac Barrow. Skinner hastened to save him-

self from the fate which in 1681 befel Locke, and gave up to the Secretary of State, not only the Latin letters, but the MS. of the theological treatise. Nothing further was known as to the fate of the MS. till 1823, when it was disinterred from one of the presses of the old State Paper Office. The Secretary of State, Sir Joseph Williamson, when he retired from office in 1678, instead of carrying away his correspondence as had been the custom, left it behind him. Thus it was that the *Treatise of Christian doctrine* first saw light, one hundred and fifty years after the author's death.

In a work which had been written as a text-book for the use of learners, there can be little scope for originality. And Milton follows the division of the matter into heads usual in the manuals then current. But it was impossible for Milton to handle the dry bones of a divinity compendium without stirring them into life. And divinity which is made to live, necessarily becomes unorthodox.

The usual method of the school text-books of the seventeenth century was to exhibit dogma in the artificial terminology of the controversies of the sixteenth century For this procedure Milton substitutes the words of Scripture simply. The traditional terms of the text-books are retained, but they are employed only as heads under which to arrange the words of Scripture. This process, which in other hands would be little better than index making, becomes here pregnant with meaning. The originality which Milton voluntarily resigns, in employing only the words of the Bible, he recovers by his freedom of exposition. He shakes himself loose from the trammels of traditional exposition, and looks at texts. for himself. The truth was

> Left only in those written records pure,
> Though not but by the spirit understood.
>
> *Paradise Lost*, xii. 510.

Upon the points which interested him most closely, Milton knew that his understanding of the text differed from the standard of Protestant orthodoxy. That God created matter, not out of nothing, but out of Himself, and that death is, in the course of nature, total extinction of being, though not opinions received, were not singular. More startling, to European modes of thinking, is his assertion that polygamy is not, in itself, contrary to morality, though it may be inexpedient. The religious sentiment of his day was offended by his vigorous vindication of the freewill of man against the reigning Calvinism, and his assertion of the inferiority of the Son in opposition to the received Athanasianism. He labours this point of the nature of God with especial care, showing how greatly it occupied his thoughts. He arranges his texts so as to exhibit in Scriptural language the semi-Arian scheme, i. e. a scheme which, admitting the co-essentiality, denies the eternal generation. Through all this manipulation of texts we seem to see, that Milton is not the school logician erecting a consistent fabric of words, but that he is dominated by an imagination peopled with concrete personalities, and labouring to assign their places to the Father and the Son as separate agents in the mundane drama. The *De doctrina Christiana* is the prose counterpart of *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, a caput mortuum of the poems, with every ethereal particle evaporated.

In the royal injunctions of 1614, James I. had ordered students in the universities not to insist too long upon compendiums, but to study the Scriptures, and to bestow their time upon the fathers and councils. In his attempt

to express dogmatic theology in the words of Scripture, Milton was unwittingly obeying this injunction. The other part of the royal direction as to fathers and councils it was not in Milton's plan to carry out. Neither indeed was it in his power, for he had not the necessary learning. M. Scherer says that Milton "laid all antiquity, sacred and profane, under contribution." So far is this from being the case, that while he exhibits, in this treatise, an intimate knowledge of the text of the canonical books, Hebrew and Greek, there is an absence of that average acquaintance with Christian antiquity which formed at that day the professional outfit of the episcopal divine. Milton's references to the fathers are perfunctory and second-hand. The only citation of Chrysostom, for instance, which I have noticed is in these words: "the same is said to be the opinion of Chrysostom, Luther, and other moderns." He did not esteem the judgment of the fathers sufficiently, to deem them worth studying. In the interpretation of texts, as in other matters of opinion, Milton withdrew within the fortress of his absolute personality.

I have now to relate the external history of the composition of *Paradise Lost*. When Milton had to skulk for a time in 1660, he was already in steady work upon the poem. Though a few lines of it were composed as early as 1642, it was not till 1658 that he took up the task of composition continuously. If we may trust our only authority (Aubrey-Phillips), he had finished it in 1663, about the time of his marriage. In polishing, re-writing, and writing out fair, much might remain to be done, after the poem was, in a way, finished. It is in 1665, that we first make acquaintance with *Paradise Lost* in a complete state. This was the year

of the plague, known in our annals as the Great Plague, to distinguish its desolating ravages from former slighter visitations of the epidemic. Every one who could fled from the city of destruction. Milton applied to his young friend Ellwood to find him a shelter. Ellwood, who was then living as tutor in the house of the Penningtons, took a cottage for Milton in their neighbourhood, at Chalfont St. Giles, in the county of Bucks. Not only the Penningtons, but General Fleetwood had also his residence near this village, and a report is mentioned by Howitt that it was Fleetwood who provided the ex-secretary with a refuge. The society of neither of these friends was available for Milton. For Fleetwood was a sentenced regicide, and in July, Pennington and Ellwood were hurried off to Aylesbury gaol by an indefatigable justice of the peace, who was desirous of giving evidence of his zeal for the king's government. That the Chalfont cottage "was not pleasantly situated," must have been indifferent to the blind old man, as much so as that the immediate neighbourhood, with its heaths and wooded uplands, reproduced the scenery he had loved when he wrote *L'Allegro*.

As soon as Ellwood was relieved from imprisonment, he turned to Chalfont. Then it was that Milton put into s hands the completed *Paradise Lost*, "bidding me take home with me, and read it at my leisure, and when I had done, return it to him with my judgment thereupon." returning it, besides giving the author the benefit of judgment, a judgment not preserved, and not indissable—the Quaker made his famous speech, "Thou said much here of *Paradise Lost*, but what hast thou ay of Paradise found?" Milton afterwards told ood that to this casual question was due his writing *dise Regained*. We are not, however, to take this

complaisant speech quite literally, for it is highly probable that the later poem was included in the original conception, if not in the scheme of the first epic. But we do get from Ellwood's reminiscence a date for the beginning of *Paradise Regained*, which must have been at Chalfont in the autumn of 1665.

When the plague was abated, and the city had become safely habitable, Milton returned to Artillery Row. He had not been long back when London was devastated by a fresh calamity, only less terrible than the plague, because it destroyed the home, and not the life. The Great Fire succeeded the Great Plague. 13,000 houses, two-thirds of the city, were reduced to ashes, and the whole current of life and business entirely suspended. Through these two overwhelming disasters, Milton must have been supporting his solitary spirit by writing *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*, and giving the final touches to *Paradise Lost*. He was now so wholly unmoved by his environment, that we look in vain in the poems for any traces of this season of suffering and disaster. The past and his own meditations were now all in all to him; the horrors of the present were as nothing to a man who had outlived his hopes. Plague and fire, what were they, after the ruin of the noblest of causes? The stoical compression of *Paradise Regained* is in perfect keeping with the fact that it was in the middle of the ruins of London that Milton placed his finished poem in the hands of the licenser.

For licenser there was now, the Archbishop of Canterbury to wit, for religious literature. Of course the Primate read by deputy, usually one of his chaplains. The reader into whose hands *Paradise Lost* came, though an Oxford man, and a cleric on his preferment, who had written his pamphlet against the dissenters, happened

to be one whose antecedents, as Fellow of All Souls, and Proctor (in 1663), ensured his taking a less pedantic and bigoted view of his duties. Still, though Dryden's dirty plays would have encountered no objection before such a tribunal, the same facilities were not likely to be accorded to anything which bore the name of John Milton, ex-secretary to Oliver, and himself an austere republican. Tomkyns—that was the young chaplain's name—did stumble at a phrase in Book i. 598,

With fear of change
Perplexes monarchs.

There had been in England, and were to be again, times when men had hanged for less than this. Tomkyns, who was sailing on the smooth sea of preferment with a fair wind, did not wish to get into trouble, but at last he let the book pass. Perhaps he thought it was only religious verse written for the sectaries, which would never be heard of at court, or among the wits, and that therefore it was of little consequence what it contained.

A publisher was found, notwithstanding that Paul's, or as it now was again, St. Paul's-Churchyard had ceased to exist, in Aldersgate, which lay outside the circuit of the conflagration. The agreement, still preserved in the national museum, between the author, "John Milton, gent. of the one parte, and Samuel Symons, printer, of the other parte," is among the curiosities of our literary history. The curiosity consists not so much in the illustrious name appended (not in autograph) to the deed, as in the contrast between the present fame of the book, and the waste-paper price at which the copyright is being valued. The author received 5*l.* down, was to receive a second 5*l.* when the first edition should be sold, a third 5*l.* when the second, and a fourth 5*l.* when the third

edition should be gone. Milton lived to receive the second 5*l.*, and no more, 10*l.* in all, *for Paradise Lost.* I cannot bring myself to join in the lamentations of the biographers over this bargain. Surely it is better so; better to know that the noblest monument of English letters had no money value, than to think of it as having been paid for at a pound the line.

The agreement with Symons is dated 27 April, 1667, the entry in the register of Stationers' Hall is 20th August. It was therefore in the autumn of 1667 that *Paradise Lost* was in the hands of the public. We have no data for the time occupied in the composition of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes.* We have seen that the former poem was begun at Chalfont in 1665, and it may be conjecturally stated that *Samson* was finished before September, 1667. At any rate, both the poems were published together in the autumn of 1670.

Milton had four years more of life granted him after this publication. But he wrote no more poetry. It was as if he had exhausted his strength in a last effort, in the Promethean agony of Samson, and knew that his hour of inspiration was passed away. But, like all men who have once tasted the joys and pangs of composition, he could not now do without its excitement. The occupation, and the indispensable solace of the last ten sad years, had been his poems. He would not write more verse, when the œstrus was not on him, but he must write. He took up all the dropped threads of past years, ambitious plans formed in the fulness of vigour, and laid aside, but not abandoned. He was the very opposite of Shelley, who could never look at a piece of his own composition a second time, but when he had thrown it off at a heat, rushed into something else. Milton's adhesiveness was such that he could never give

up a design once entered upon. In these four years, as if conscious that his time was now nearly out, he laboured to complete five such early undertakings.

(1.) Of his *Compendium of Theology* I have already spoken. He was overtaken by death while preparing this for the press.

(2.) His *History of Britain* must have cost him much labour, bestowed upon comparison of the conflicting authorities. It is the record of the studies he had made for his abandoned epic poem, and is evidence how much the subject occupied his mind.

The *History of Britain*, 1670, had been preceded by (3) a Latin grammar, in 1669, and was followed by (4) a Logic on the method of Ramus, 1672.

(5.) In 1673 he brought out a new edition of his early volume of *Poems*. In this volume he printed for the first time the sonnets, and other pieces, which had been written in the interval of twenty-seven years since the date of his first edition. Not, indeed, all the sonnets which we now have. Four, in which Fairfax, Vane, Cromwell, and the Commonwealth are spoken of as Milton would speak of them, were necessarily kept back, and not put into print till 1694, by Phillips, at the end of his life of his uncle.

whelming magnitude, which he did not live to complete. We have seen that he taught his pupils geography out of *Davity, Description de l'Univers.* He was not satisfied with this, or with any existing compendium. They were all dry; exact enough with their latitudes and longitudes, but omitted such uninteresting stuff as manners, government, religion, &c. Milton would essay a better system. All he had ever executed was Russia, taking the pains to turn over and extract for his purpose all the best travels in that country. This is the fragment which figures in his Works as a *Brief History of Moscovia.*

The hackneyed metaphor of Pegasus harnessed to a luggage trolley, will recur to us when we think of the author of *L'Allegro*, setting himself to compile a Latin lexicon. If there is any literary drudgery more mechanical than another, it is generally supposed to be that of making a dictionary. Nor had he taken to this industry as a resource in age, when the genial flow of invention had dried up, and original composition had ceased to be in his power. The three folio volumes of MS. which Milton left were the work of his youth; it was a work which the loss of eyesight of necessity put an end to. It is not Milton only, but all students who read with an alert mind, reading to grow, and not to remember, who have felt the want of an occupation which shall fill those hours when mental vigilance is impossible, and vacuity unendurable. Index-making or cataloguing has been the resource of many in such hours. But it was not, I think, as a mere shifting of mental posture that Milton undertook to rewrite Robert Stephens; it was as part of his language training. Only by diligent practice and incessant exercise of attention and care, could Milton have educated his susceptibility to the specific power of words to the nicety which he attained

beyond any other of our poets. Part of this education is recorded in the seemingly withered leaves of his Latin Thesaurus, though the larger part must have been achieved, not by a reflective and critical collection of examples, but by a vital and impassioned reading.

Milton's complaint was what the profession of that day called gout. "He would be very cheerful even in his gout fits, and sing," says Aubrey. This gout returned again and again, and by these repeated attacks wore out his resisting power. He died of the "gout struck in" on Sunday, 8th November, 1674, and was buried, near his father, in the chancel of St. Giles's, Cripplegate. The funeral was attended, Toland says, "by all his learned and great friends in London, not without a friendly concourse of the vulgar." The disgusting profanation of the leaden coffin, and dispersion of the poet's bones by the parochial authorities, during the repair of the church in August, 1790, has been denied, but it is to be feared the fact is too true.

CHAPTER XIII.

PARADISE LOST—PARADISE REGAINED—SAMSON AGONISTES

"MANY men of forty," it has been said, "are dead poets;" and it might seem that Milton, Latin secretary, and party pamphleteer, had died to poetry about the fatal age. In 1645, when he made a gathering of his early pieces for the volume published by Humphry Moseley, he wanted three years of forty. That volume contained, besides other things, *Comus*, *Lycidas*, *L'Allegro*, and *Il Penseroso*, then, when produced, as they remain to this day, the finest flower of English poesy. But, though thus like a wary husbandman, garnering his sheaves in presence of the threatening storm, Milton had no intention of bidding farewell to poetry. On the contrary, he regarded this volume only as first-fruits, an earnest of greater things to come.

The ruling idea of Milton's life, and the key to his mental history, is his resolve to produce a great poem. Not that the aspiration in itself is singular, for it is probably shared by every young poet in his turn. As every clever schoolboy is destined by himself or his friends to become Lord Chancellor, and every private in the French army carries in his haversack the bâton of a marshal, so it is a necessary ingredient of the dream on Parnassus,

that it should embody itself in a form of surpassing brilliance. What distinguishes Milton from the crowd of young ambition, "audax juventa," is the constancy of resolve. He not only nourished through manhood the dream of youth, keeping under the importunate instincts which carry off most ambitions in middle life into the pursuit of place, profit, honour—the thorns which spring up and smother the wheat—but carried out his dream in its integrity in old age. He formed himself for this achievement, and for no other. Study at home, travel abroad, the arena of political controversy, the public service, the practice of the domestic virtues, were so many parts of the schooling which was to make a poet.

The reader who has traced with me thus far the course of Milton's mental development will perhaps be ready to believe, that this idea had taken entire possession of his mind from a very early age. The earliest written record of it is of date 1632, in Sonnet II. This was written as early as the poet's twenty-third year; and in these lines the resolve is uttered, not as then just conceived, but as one long brooded upon, and its non-fulfilment matter of self-reproach.

If this sonnet stood alone, its relevance to a poetical, or even a literary performance, might be doubtful. But at the time of its composition it is enclosed in a letter to an unnamed friend, who seems to have been expressing his surprise that the Cambridge B.A. was not settling himself, now that his education was complete, to a profession. Milton's apologetic letter is extant, and was printed by Birch in 1738. It intimates that Milton did not consider his education, for the purpose he had in view, as anything like complete. It is not "the endless delight of speculation," but "a religious advisement how best to undergo;

not taking thought of being late, so it give advantage to be more fit." He repudiates the love of learning for its own sake; knowledge is not an end, it is only equipment for performance. There is here no specific engagement as to the nature of the performance. But what it is to be, is suggested by the enclosure of the "Petrarchian stanza" (i.e. the sonnet). This notion that his life was like Samuel's, a dedicated life, dedicated to a service which required a long probation, recurs again more than once in his writings. It is emphatically repeated, in 1641, in a passage of the pamphlet No. 4:—

None hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit none shall,—that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and full license will extend. Neither do I *think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader that for* some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous acts and affairs. Till which in some measure be compassed, at mine own peril and cost, I refuse not to sustain this expectation, from as many as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them.

In 1638, at the age of nine and twenty, Milton has already determined that this lifework shall be a poem, an epic poem, and that its subject shall probably be the Arthurian legend.

Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,
Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem,
Aut dicam invictæ sociali fœdere mensæ
Magnanimos heroas, et, o modo spiritus adsit!
Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub marte phalanges.

May I find such a friend . . . . when, if ever, I shall revive in song our native princes, and among them Arthur moving to the fray even in the nether world, and when I shall, if only inspiration be mine, break the Saxon bands before our Britons' prowess.

The same announcement is reproduced in the *Epitaphium Damonis*, 1639, and, in Pamphlet No. 4, in the often quoted words :—

Perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty, or thereabout, met with acceptance, . . . I began to assent to them (the Italians) and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grows daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes as they should not willingly let it die.

Between the publication of the collected *Poems* in 1645, and the appearance of *Paradise Lost* in 1667, a period of twenty-two years, Milton gave no public sign of redeeming this pledge. He seemed to his cotemporaries to have renounced the follies of his youth, the gewgaws of verse, and to have sobered down into the useful citizen. "Le bon poëte," thought Malherbe, "n'est pas plus utile à l'état qu'un bon joueur de quilles." Milton had postponed his poem, in 1641, till "the land had once enfranchished herself from this impertinent yoke of prelatry, under whose inquisitorious and tyrannical

duncery no free and splendid wit can flourish." Prelatry was swept away, and he asked for further remand on account of the war. Peace was concluded, the country was settled under the strong government of a Protector, and Milton's great work did not appear. It was not even preparing. He was writing not poetry but prose, and that most ephemeral and valueless kind of prose, pamphlets, extempore articles on the topics of the day. He poured out reams of them, in simple unconsciousness that they had no influence whatever on the current of events.

Nor was it that, during all these years, Milton was meditating in secret what he could not bring forward in public; that he was only holding back from publishing, because there was no public ready to listen to his song. In these years Milton was neither writing nor thinking poetry. Of the twenty-four sonnets indeed—twenty-four, reckoning the twenty-lined piece, "The forcers of conscience," as a sonnet—eleven belong to this period. But they do not form a continuous series, such as do Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, nor do they evince a sustained mood of poetical meditation. On the contrary, their very force and beauty consist in their being the momentary and spontaneous explosion of an emotion welling up from the depths of the soul, and forcing itself into metrical expression, as it were, in spite of the writer. While the first eight sonnets, written before 1645, are sonnets of reminiscence and intention, like those of the Italians, or the ordinary English sonnet, the eleven sonnets of Milton's silent period, from 1645 to 1658, are records of present feeling kindled by actual facts. In their naked, unadorned simplicity of language, they may easily seem, to a reader fresh from Petrarch, to be homely and prosaic. Place them in relation to the

circumstance on which each piece turns, and we begin to feel the superiority for poetic effect of real emotion over emotion meditated and revived. History has in it that which can touch us more abidingly than any fiction. It is this actuality which distinguishes the sonnets of Milton from any other sonnets. Of this difference Wordsworth was conscious when he struck out the phrase, "In his hand the *thing became* a trumpet." Macaulay compared the sonnets in their majestic severity to the collects. They remind us of a Hebrew psalm, with its undisguised outrush of rage, revenge, exultation, or despair, where nothing is due to art or artifice, and whose poetry is the expression of the heart, and not a branch of literature. It is in the sonnets we most realise the force of Wordsworth's image—

Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea.

We are not then to look in the sonnets for latent traces of the suspended poetic creation. They come from the other side of Milton's nature, the political, not the artistic. They are akin to the prose pamphlets, not to *Paradise Lost*. Just when the sonnets end, the composition of the epic was taken in hand. The last of the sonnets (23 in the ordinary numeration) was written in 1658, and it is to the same year that our authority, Aubrey-Phillips, refers his beginning to occupy himself with *Paradise Lost*. He had by this time settled the two points about which he had been long in doubt, the subject, and the form. Long before bringing himself to the point of composition, he had decided upon the Fall of man as subject, and upon the narrative, or epic, form, in preference to the dramatic. It is even possible that a few isolated passages of the poem, as it now stands, may have been written before. Of one

such passage we know that it was written fifteen or sixteen years before 1668, and while he was still contemplating a drama. The lines are Satan's speech, *P. L.* iv. 32, beginning,—

O, thou that with surpassing glory crowned.

These lines, Phillips says, his uncle recited to him, as forming the opening of his tragedy. They are modelled, as the classical reader will perceive, upon Euripides. Possibly they were not intended for the very first lines, since if Milton intended to follow the practice of his model, the lofty lyrical tone of this address should have been introduced by a prosaic matter-of-fact setting forth of the situation, as in the Euripidean prologue. There are other passages in the poem which have the air of being insititious in the place where they stand. The lines in Book iv, now in question, may reasonably be referred to 1640-42, the date of those leaves in the Trinity College MS., in which Milton has written down, with his own hand, various sketches of tragedies, which might possibly be adopted as his final choice.

A passage in *The Reason of Church Government*, written at the same period, 1641, gives us the the fullest account of his hesitation. It was a hesitation caused, partly by the wealth of matter which his reading suggested to him, partly by the consciousness that he ought not to begin in haste while each year was ripening his powers. Every one who has undertaken a work of any length has made the experience, that the faculty of composition will not work with ease, until the reason is satisfied that the subject chosen is a congenial one. Gibbon has told us himself of the many periods of history upon which he tried his pen, even after the memorable 15 October, 1764, when

he "sate musing amid the ruins of the Capitol, while the bare-footed friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter." We know how many sketches of possible tragedies Racine would make before he could adopt one as the appropriate theme, on which he could work with that thorough enjoyment of the labour, which is necessary to give life and verve to any creation, whether of the poet or the orator.

The leaves of the Trinity College MS., which are contemporary with his confidence to the readers of his tract *Of Church Government*, exhibit a list of nearly one hundred subjects, which had occurred to him from time to time as practicable subjects. From the mode of entry we see that, already in 1641, a scriptural was likely to have the preference over a profane subject, and that among scriptural subjects *Paradise Lost* (the familiar title appears in this early note), stands out prominently above the rest. The historical subjects are all taken from native history, none are foreign, and all are from the time before the Roman conquest. The scriptural subjects are partly from the Old, partly from the New, Testament. Some of these subjects are named and nothing more, while others are slightly sketched out. Among these latter are *Baptistes*, on the death of John the Baptist, and *Christus Patiens*, apparently to be confined to the agony in the garden. Of *Paradise Lost* there are four drafts in greater detail than any of the others. These drafts of the plot or action, though none of them that which was finally adopted, are sufficiently near to the action of the poem as it stands, to reveal to us the fact that the author's imaginative conception of what he intended to produce was generated, cast, and moulded, at a comparatively early age. The commonly received notion, therefore, with which authors, as they age, are

wont to comfort themselves, that one of the greatest feats of original invention achieved by man, was begun after fifty, must be thus far modified. *Paradise Lost* was *composed* after fifty, but was *conceived* at thirty-two. Hence the high degree of perfection realised in the total result. [illegible] virtues [illegible] daring [illegible] hood, with the exercised judgment and chastened taste of ripened years. We have regarded the twenty-five years of Milton's life between 1641 and the commencement of *Paradise Lost*, as time ill laid out upon inferior work which any one could do, and which was not worth doing by any one. Yet it may be made a question if in any other mode than by adjournment of his early design, Milton could have attained to that union of original strength with severe restraint, which distinguishes from all other poetry, except that of Virgil, the three great poems of his old age. If the fatigue of age is sometimes felt in *Paradise Regained*, we feel in *Paradise Lost* only (in the words of Chateaubriand), "la maturité de l'âge à travers les passions des légères années ; une charme extraordinaire de vieillesse et de jeunesse."

A still further inference is warranted by the Trinity College jottings of 1641. Not the critics merely, but readers ready to sympathise, have been sometimes inclined to wish that Milton had devoted his power to a more human subject, in which the poet's invention could have had freer play, and for which his reader's interest could have been more ready. And it has been thought that the choice of a Biblical subject indicates the narrowing effect of age, adversity, and blindness combined. We now know that the Fall was the theme, if not determined on, at

least predominant in Milton's thoughts, at the age of thirty-two. His ripened judgment only approved a selection made in earlier years, and in days full of hope. That in selecting a scriptural subject he was not in fact exercising any choice, but was determined by his circumstances, is only what must be said of all choosing. With all his originality, Milton was still a man of his age. A Puritan poet, in a Puritan environment, could not have done otherwise. But even had choice been in his power, it is doubtful if he would have had the same success with a subject taken from history.

First, looking at his public. He was to write in English. This, which had at one time been matter of doubt, had at an early stage come to be his decision. Nor had the choice of English been made for the sake of popularity, which he despised. He did not desire to write for the many, but for the few. But he was enthusiastically atriotic. He had entire contempt for the shouts of the nob, but the English nation, as embodied in the persons f the wise and good, he honoured and reverenced with all ne depth of his nature. It was for the sake of his nation at he was to devote his life to a work, which was to noble her tongue among the languages of Europe. He was then to write in English, for the English, not pularly, but nationally. This resolution at once limited subject. He who aspires to be the poet of a nation is nd to adopt a hero who is already dear to that people, hoose a subject and characters which are already liar to them. This is no rule of literary art rarily enacted by the critic, it is a dictate of reason, as been the practice of all the great national poets. more obvious examples will occur to every reader. t may be observed that even the Greek tragedians,

who addressed a more limited audience than the epic poets, took their plots from the best known legends touching the fortunes of the royal houses of the Hellenic race. Now to the English reader of the seventeenth century—and the same holds good to this day—there were only two cycles of persons and events sufficiently known beforehand to admit of being assumed by a poet. He must go either to the Bible, or to the annals of England. Thus far Milton's choice of subject was limited by the consideration of the public for whom he wrote.

Secondly, he was still farther restricted by a condition which the nature of his own intelligence imposed upon himself. It was necessary for Milton that the events and personages, which were to arouse and detain his interests, should be real events and personages. The mere play of fancy with the pretty aspects of things could not satisfy him; he wanted to feel beneath him a substantial world of reality. He had not the dramatist's imagination which can body forth fictitious characters with such life-like reality that it can, and does itself, believe in their existence. Macaulay has truly said that Milton's genius is lyrical, not dramatic. His lyre will only echo real emotion, and his imagination is only stirred by real circumstances. In his youth he had been within the fascination of the romances of chivalry, as well in their original form, as in the reproductions of Ariosto and Spenser. While under this influence he had thought of seeking his subject among the heroes of these lays of old minstrelsy. And as one of his principles was that his hero must be a national hero, it was of course upon the Arthurian cycle that his aspiration fixed. When he did so, he no doubt believed at least the historical existence of Arthur. As soon, however, as he came to understand the fabulous basis of the Arthurian legend,

it became unfitted for his use. In the Trinity College MS. of 1641, Arthur has already disappeared from the list of possible subjects, a list which contains thirty-eight suggestions of names from British or Saxon history, such as Vortigern, Edward the Confessor, Harold, Macbeth, &c. While he demanded the basis of reality for his personages, he at the same time, with a true instinct, rejected all that fell within the period of well-ascertained history. He made the Conquest the lower limit of his choice. In this negative decision against historical romance we recognise Milton's judgment, and his correct estimate of his own powers. Those who have been thought to succeed best in engrafting fiction upon history, Shakspeare or Walter Scott, have been eminently human poets, and have achieved their measure of success by investing some well-known name with the attributes of ordinary humanity such as we all know it. This was precisely what Milton could not have done. He had none of that sympathy with which Shakspeare embraced all natural and common affections of his brother men. Milton, burning as he did with a consuming fire of passion, and yearning for rapt communion with select souls, had withal an aloofness from ordinary men and women, and a proud disdain of commonplace joy and sorrow, which has led hasty biographers and critics to represent him as hard, austere, an iron man of iron mould. This want of interest in common life disqualified him for the task of revivifying historic scenes.

Milton's mental constitution, then, demanded in the material upon which it was to work, a combination of qualities such as very few subjects could offer. The events and personages must be real and substantial, for he could not occupy himself seriously with airy nothings and

creatures of pure fancy. Yet they must not be such events and personages as history had pourtrayed to us with well-known characters, and all their virtues, faults, foibles, and peculiarities. And, lastly, it was requisite that they should be the common property and the familiar interest of a wide circle of English readers.

These being the conditions required in the subject, it is obvious that no choice was left to the poet in the England of the seventeenth century but a biblical subject. And

belongs to no other single event in the Jewish annals. The first section of the book of Genesis clothes in a dramatic form the dogmatic idea from which was developed in the course of ages the whole scheme of Judaico-Christian anthropology. In this world-drama, Heaven above and Hell beneath, the powers of light and those of darkness, are both brought upon the scene in conflict with each other, over the fate of the inhabitants of our globe, a minute ball of matter suspended between two infinities. This gigantic and unmanageable material is so completely mastered by the poet's imagination, that we are made to feel at one and the same time the petty dimensions of our earth in comparison with primordial space and almighty power, and the profound import to us of the issue depending on the conflict. Other poets, of inferior powers, have from time to time attempted, with different degrees of success, some of the minor Scriptural histories; Bodmer, the Noachian Deluge; Solomon Gessner, the Death of Abel, &c. And Milton himself, after he had spent his full strength upon his greater theme, recurred in *Samson Agonistes* to one such episode, which he had deliberately

set aside before, as not giving verge enough for the sweep of his soaring conception.

These considerations duly weighed, it will be found that the subject of the Fall of Man was not so much Milton's choice as his necessity. Among all the traditions of the peoples of the earth, there is not extant another story which could have been adequate to his demands. Biographers may have been somewhat misled by his speaking of himself as "long choosing and beginning late." He did *not* begin till 1658, when he was already fifty, and it has been somewhat hastily inferred that he did not choose till the date at which he began. But, as we have seen, he had already chosen at least as early as 1642, when the plan of a drama on the subject, and under the title, of *Paradise Lost* was fully developed. In the interval between 1642 and 1658, he changed the form from a drama to an epic, but his choice remained unaltered. And as the address to the sun (*Paradise Lost*, iv. 32) was composed at the earlier of these dates, it appears that he had already formulated even the rhythm and cadence of the poem that was to be. Like Wordsworth's "Warrior"—

> He wrought
> *Upon the plan that pleas'd his boyish thought.*

I have said that this subject of the Fall was Milton's necessity, being the only subject which his mind, "in the spacious circuits of her musing," found large enough. But as it was no abrupt or arbitrary choice, so it was not forced upon him from without, by suggestion of friends, or command of a patron. We must again remind ourselves that Milton had a Calvinistic bringing up. And Calvinism in pious Puritan souls of that fervent age was not the attenuated creed of the eighteenth century, the Calvinism which went not beyond personal gratification of

safety for oneself, and for the rest damnation. When Milton was being reared, Calvinism was not old and effete, a mere doctrine. It was a living system of thought, and one which carried the mind upwards towards the Eternal will, rather than downwards towards my personal security. Keble has said of the old Catholic views, founded on sacramental symbolism, that they are more poetical than any other religious conception. But it must be acknowledged that a predestinarian scheme, leading the cogitation upward to dwell upon "the heavenly things before the foundation of the world," opens a vista of contemplation and poetical framework, with which none other in the whole cycle of human thought can compare. Not election and reprobation as set out in the petty chicanery of Calvin's *Institutes*, but the prescience of absolute wisdom revolving all the possibilities of time, space, and matter. Poetry has been defined as "the suggestion by the image of noble grounds for noble emotions," and, in this respect, none of the world-epics—there are at most five or six such in existence—can compete with *Paradise Lost*. The [illegible] pierces the heart [illegible] Milton's, but the [illegible] s, being limited [illegible] izon of *Paradise* [illegible] chronology not [illegible] earth becomes a mere spot in the physical universe, and that universe itself a drop suspended in the infinite empyrean. His aspiration had thus reached "one of the highest arcs that human contemplation circling upwards can make from the glassy sea whereon she stands" (*Doctr. and Disc.*). Like his contemporary Pascal, his mind had beaten her wings against the prison walls of human thought.

The vastness of the scheme of *Paradise Lost* may

become more apparent to us if we remark that, within its embrace, there seems to be equal place for both the systems of physical astronomy which were current in the seventeenth century. In England, about the time *Paradise Lost* was being written, the Copernican theory, which placed the sun in the centre of our system, was already the established belief of the few well-informed. The old Ptolemaic or Alphonsine system, which explained the phenomena on the hypothesis of nine (or ten) transparent hollow spheres wheeling round the stationary earth, was still the received astronomy of ordinary people. These two beliefs, the one based on science, though still wanting the calculation which Newton was to supply to make it demonstrative, the other supported by the tradition of ages, were, at the time we speak of, in presence of each other in the public mind. They are in presence of each other also in Milton's epic. And the systems confront each other in the poem, in much the same relative position which they occupied in the mind of the public. The ordinary, habitual mode of speaking of celestial phenomena is Ptolemaic (see *Paradise Lost*, vii. 339; iii. 481). The conscious, or doctrinal, exposition of the same phenomena is Copernican (see *Paradise Lost*, viii. 122). Sharp as is the contrast between the two systems, the one being the direct contradictory of the other, they are lodged together, not harmonised, within the vast circuit of the poet's imagination. The precise mechanism of an object so little as is our world in comparison with the immense totality may be justly disregarded. "De minimis non curat poeta." In the universe of being the difference between a heliocentric and a geocentric theory of our solar system is of as small moment, as the reconcilement of fixed fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute is in the

realm of absolute intelligence. The one is the frivolous pastime of devils; the other the Great Architect

> Hath left to their disputes, perhaps to move
> His laughter at their quaint opinions wide.

As one, and the principal, inconsistency in Milton's presentment of his matter has now been mentioned, a general remark may be made upon the conceptual incongruities in *Paradise Lost*. The poem abounds in such, and the critics, from Addison downwards, have busied themselves in finding out more and more of them. Mil- [illegible] iv. 449)—

> That day I oft remember, when from sleep
> I first awak'd.

But in the chronology of the poem, Adam himself, whose creation preceded that of Eve, was but three days old at the time this reminiscence is repeated to him. The mode in which the Son of God is spoken of is not either consistent Athanasianism or consistent Arianism. Above all there is an incessant confusion of material and immaterial in the acts ascribed to the angels. Dr. Johnson, who wished for consistency, would have had it preserved "by keeping immateriality out of sight." And a general arraignment has been laid against Milton of a vagueness and looseness of imagery, which contrasts unfavourably with the vivid and precise detail of other poets, of Homer or of Dante, for example.

Now first, it must be said that Milton is not one of the poets of inaccurate imagination. He could never, like

Scott, have let the precise picture of the swan on "still Saint Mary's lake" slip into the namby-pamby "sweet Saint Mary's lake." When he intends a picture, he is unmistakably distinct; his outline is firm and hard. But he is not often intending pictures. He is not, like Dante, always seeing—he is mostly thinking in a dream, or as Coleridge best expressed it, he is not a picturesque, but a musical poet. The pictures in *Paradise Lost* are like the paintings on the walls of some noble hall—only part of the total magnificence. He did not aim at that finish of minute parts in which each bit fits into every other. For it was only by such disregard of minutiæ that the theme could be handled at all. The impression of vastness, the sense that everything, as Bishop Butler says, "runs up into infinity," would have been impaired if he had drawn attention to the details of his figures. Had he had upon his canvas only a single human incident, with ordinary human agents, he would have known, as well as other far inferior artists, how to secure perfection of illusion by exactness of detail. But he had undertaken to present, not the world of human experience, but a supernatural world, peopled by supernatural beings, God and his Son, angels and archangels, devils; a world in which Sin and Death may be personified without palpable absurdity. Even his one human pair are exceptional beings, from whom we are prepared not to demand conformity to the laws of life which now prevail in our world. Had he presented all these spiritual personages in definite form to the eye, the result would have been degradation. We should have had the ridiculous instead of the sublime, as in the scene of the *Iliad*, where Diomede wounds Aphrodite in the hand, and sends her crying home to her father. Once or twice Milton has ventured too

near the limit of material adaptation, trying to explain *how* angelic natures subsist, as in the passage (*Paradise Lost*, v. 405) where Raphael tells Adam that angels eat and digest food like man. Taste here receives a shock, because the incongruity, which before was latent, is forced upon our attention. We are threatened with being transported out of the conventional world of Heaven, Hell, Chaos, and Paradise, to which we had well adapted ourselves, into the real world in which we know that such beings could not breathe and move.

For the world of *Paradise Lost* is an ideal, conventional world, quite as much as the world of the *Arabian Nights*, or the world of the chivalrous romance, or that of the pastoral novel. Not only dramatic, but all, poetry is founded on illusion. We must, though it be but for the moment, suppose it true. We must be transported out of the actual world into that world in which the given scene is laid. It is chiefly the business of the poet to effect this transportation, but the reader (or hearer) must aid. "Willst du Dichter ganz verstehen, musst in Dichter's Lande gehen." If the reader's imagination is not active enough to assist the poet, he must at least not resist him. When we are once inside the poet's heaven, our critical faculty may justly require that what takes place there shall be consistent with itself, with the laws of that fantastic world. But we may not begin by objecting that it is impossible that such a world should exist. If, in any age, the power of imagination is enfeebled, the reader becomes more unable to make this effort; he ceases to co-operate with the poet. Much of the criticism on *Paradise Lost* which we meet with resolves itself into a refusal on the part of the critic, to make that initial abondonment to the conditions which the poet demands; a determina-

tion to insist that his heaven, peopled with deities, dominations, principalities, and powers, shall have the same material laws which govern our planetary system. It is not, as we often hear it said, that the critical faculty is unduly developed in the nineteenth century. It is that the imaginative faculty fails us; and when that is the case, criticism is powerless—it has no fundamental assumption upon which its judgments can proceed.

It is the triumph of Milton's skill to have made his ideal world actual, if not to every English mind's eye, yet to a larger number of minds than have ever been reached by any other poetry in our language. Popular (in the common use of the word) Milton has not been, and cannot be. But the world he created has taken possession of the public mind. Huxley complains that the false cosmogony, which will not yield to the conclusions of scientific research, is derived from the seventh book of *Paradise Lost*, rather than from Genesis. This success Milton owes partly to his selection of his subject, partly to his skill in handling it. In his handling, he presents his spiritual existences with just so much relief as to endow them with life and personality, and not with that visual distinctness which would at once reveal their spectral immateriality, and so give a shock to the illusion. We might almost say of his personages that they are shapes, "if shape it might be called, that shape had none." By his art of suggestion by association, he does all he can to aid us to realise his agents, and at the moment when distinctness would disturb, he withdraws the object into a mist, and so disguises the incongruities which he could not avoid. The tact that avoids difficulties inherent in the nature of things, is an art which gets the least appreciation either in life or in litera-

ture. But if we would have some measure of the skill which in *Paradise Lost* has made impossible beings possible to the imagination, we may find it in contrasting them with the incarnated abstraction and spirit voices, which we encounter at every turn in Shelley, creatures who leave behind them no more distinct impression than that we have been in a dream peopled with ghosts. Shelley, too,

> Voyag'd th' unreal, vast, unbounded deep
> Of horrible confusion.
>
> *Paradise Lost*, x. 470.

and left it the chaos which he found it. Milton has elicited from similar elements a conception so life-like that his poetical version has inseparably grafted itself upon, if it has not taken the place of, the historical narrative of the original creation.

So much Milton has effected by his skilful treatment. But the illusion was greatly facilitated by his choice of subject. He had not to create his supernatural personages, they were already there. The Father, and the Son, the Angels, Satan, Baal and Moloch, Adam and Eve, were in full possession of the popular imagination, and more familiar to it than any other set of known names. Nor was the belief accorded to them a half belief, a bare admission of their possible existence, such as prevails at other times or in some countries. In the England of Milton, the angels and devils of the Jewish Scriptures were more real beings, and better vouched, than any historical personages could be. The old chronicles were full of lies, but this was Bible truth. There might very likely have been a Henry VIII., and he might have been such as he is described, but at any rate he was dead and gone, while

Satan still lived and walked the earth, the identical Satan who had deceived Eve.

Nor was it only to the poetic public that his personages were real, true, and living beings. The poet himself believed as entirely in their existence as did his readers. I insist upon this point, because one of the first of living critics has declared of *Paradise Lost* that it is a poem in which every artifice of invention is consciously employed, not a single fact being, for an instant, conceived as tenable by any living faith. (Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 138). On the contrary, we shall not rightly apprehend either the poetry or the character of the poet until we feel that throughout *Paradise Lost*, as in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson*, Milton felt himself to be standing on the sure ground of fact and reality. It was not in Milton's nature to be a showman, parading before an audience a phantasmagoria of spirits, which he himself knew to be puppets tricked up for the entertainment of an idle hour. We are told by Lockhart, that the old man who told the story of Gilpin Horner to Lady Dalkeith *bonâ fide* believed the existence of the elf. Lady Dalkeith repeated the tale to Walter Scott, who worked it up with consummate skill into the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. This is a case of a really believed legend of diablerie becoming the source of a literary fiction. Scott neither believed in the reality of the goblin page himself, nor expected his readers to believe it. He could not rise beyond the poetry of amusement, and no poetry with only this motive can ever be more than literary art.

Other than this was Milton's conception of his own function. Of the fashionable verse, such as was written in the Caroline age, or in any age, he disapproved, not only because it was imperfect art, but because it was untrue

utterance. Poems that were raised "from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite," were in his eyes treachery to the poet's high vocation.

> Poetical powers "are the inspired gift of God rarely bestowed . . . in every nation, and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbation of the mind, and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence [illegible] ..ints, [illegible] ..ently [illegible] the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship."

So he had written in 1642, and this lofty faith in his calling supported him twenty years later, in the arduous labour of his attempt to realise his own ideal. In setting himself down to compose *Paradise Lost* and *Regained*, he regarded himself not as an author, but as a medium, the mouthpiece of "that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and all knowledge; Urania, heavenly muse," visits him nightly,

> And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires
> Easy my unpremeditated verse
>
> *Paradise Lost*, ix. 24.

Urania bestows the flowing words and musical sweetness; to God's Spirit he looks to

> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence

> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.
>
> *Paradise Lost*, iii. 50.

The singers with whom he would fain equal himself are not Dante, or Tasso, or, as Dryden would have it, Spencer, but

> Blind Thamyris, and blind Mæonides,
> And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old.

As he is equalled with these in misfortune—loss of sight—he would emulate them in function. Orpheus and Musæus are the poets he would fain have as the companions of his midnight meditation (*Penseroso*). And the function of the poet is like that of the prophet in the old dispensation, not to invent, but to utter. It is God's truth which passes his lips—lips hallowed by the touch of sacred fire. He is the passive instrument through whom flows the emanation from on high; his words are not his own, but a suggestion. Even for style Milton is indebted to his "celestial patroness who deigns her nightly visitation unimplor'd."

Milton was not dependent upon a dubious tradition in the subject he had selected. Man's fall and recovery were recorded in the Scriptures. And the two media of truth, the internal and the external, as deriving from the same source, must needs be in harmony. That the Spirit enlightens the mind within, in this belief the Puritan saint, the poet, and the prophet, who all met in Milton, were at one. That the Old Testament Scriptures were also a revelation from God, was an article of faith which he had never questioned. Nor did he only receive these books as conveying in substance a divine view of the world's history, he regarded them as in the letter a transcript of fact.

If the poet-prophet would tell the story of creation or redemption, he was thus restrained not only by the general outline and imagery of the Bible, but by its very words. And here we must note the skill of the poet in surmounting an added or artificial difficulty, in the subject he had chosen as combined with his notion of inspiration. He must not deviate in a single syllable from the words of the Hebrew books. He must take up into his poem the whole of the sacred narrative. This he must do, not merely because his readers would expect such literal accuracy from him, but because to himself that narrative was the very truth which he was undertaking to deliver. The additions which his fancy or inspiration might supply must be restrained by this severe law, that they should be such as to aid the reader's imagination to conceive how the event took place. They must by no means be suffered to alter, disfigure, traduce the substance or the letter of the revelation. This is what Milton has done. He has told the story of creation in the very words of Scripture. The whole of the seventh book, is little more than a paraphrase of a few verses of Genesis. What he has added is so little incongruous with his original, that most English men and women would probably have some difficulty in discriminating in recollection the part they derive from Moses, from that which they have added from the paraphrast. In Genesis it is the serpent who tempts Eve, in virtue of his natural wiliness. In Milton it is Satan who has entered into the body of a serpent and supplied the intelligence. Here indeed Milton was only adopting a gloss, as ancient at least as the Book of Wisdom (ii. 24). But it is the gloss, and not the text of Moses, which is in possession of our minds, and who has done most to lodge it there, Milton or the commentators?

Again, it is Milton and not Moses who makes the serpent pluck and eat the first apple from the tree. But Bp. Wilson comments upon the words of Genesis (iii. 6) as though they contained this purely Miltonic circumstance.

It could hardly but be that one or two of the incidents which Milton has supplied, the popular imagination has been unable to homologate. Such an incident is the placing of artillery in the wars in heaven. We reject this suggestion, and find it mars probability. But it would not seem so improbable to Milton's contemporaries, not only because it was an article of the received poetic tradition (see *Ronsard* 6, p. 40), but also because fire-arms had not quite ceased to be regarded as a devilish enginery of a new warfare, unfair in the knightly code of honour, a base substitute of mechanism for individual valour. It was gunpowder and not *Don Quixote* which had destroyed the age of chivalry.

Another of Milton's fictions which has been found too grotesque is the change (*P. L.*, x. 508) of the demons into serpents, who hiss their Prince on his return from his embassy. Here it is not, I think, so much the unnatural character of the incident itself, as its gratuitousness which offends. It does not help us to conceive the situation. A suggestion of Chateaubriand may therefore go some way towards reconciling the reader even to this caprice of imagination. It indicates, he says, the degradation of Satan, who, from the superb Intelligence of the early scenes of the poem, is become at its close a hideous reptile. He has not triumphed, but has failed, and is degraded into the old dragon, who haunts among the damned. The bruising of his head has already commenced.

The bridge, again, which Sin and Death construct

(*Paradise Lost*, x. 300), leading from the mouth of hell to the wall of the world, has a chilling effect upon the imagination of a modern reader. It does not assist the conception of the cosmical system which we accept in the earlier books. This clumsy fiction seems more at home in the grotesque and lawless mythology of the Turks, or in the Persian poet Sadi, who is said by Marmontel to have adopted it from the Turk. If Milton's intention were to reproduce Jacob's ladder, he should, like Dante (*Parad.* xxi. 25), have made it the means of communication between heaven and earth.

It is possible that Milton himself, after the experiment of *Paradise Lost* was fully before him, suspected that he had supplemented too much for his purpose; that his imagery, which was designed to illustrate history, might stand in its light. For in the composition of *Paradise Regained* (published 1671) he has adopted a much severer style. In this poem he has not only curbed his imagination, but has almost suppressed it. He has amplified, but has hardly introduced any circumstance which is not in the original. *Paradise Regained* is little more than a paraphrase of the Temptation as found in the synoptical gospels. It is a marvel of ingenuity that more than two thousand lines of blank verse can have been constructed out of some twenty lines of prose, without the addition of any invented incident, or the insertion of any irrelevant digression. In the first three books of *Paradise Regained* there is not a single simile. Nor yet can it be said that the version of the gospel narrative has the fault of most paraphrases, viz., that of weakening the effect, and obliterating the chiselled features of the original. Let a reader take *Paradise Regained* not as a theme used as a *canvas for poetical embroidery, an opportunity for an author*

to show off his powers of writing, but as a *bonâ fide* attempt to impress upon the mind the story of the Temptation, and he will acknowledge the concealed art of the genuine epic poet, bent before all things upon telling his tale. It will still be capable of being alleged that the story told does not interest; that the composition is dry, hard, barren; the style as of set purpose divested of the attributes of poetry. It is not necessary indeed that an epic should be in twelve books; but we do demand in an epic poem multiplicity of character and variety of incident. In *Paradise Regained* there are only two personages, both of whom are supernatural. Indeed, they can scarcely be called personages; the poet, in his fidelity to the letter, not having thought fit to open up the fertile vein of delineation which was afforded by the human character of Christ. The speakers are no more than the abstract principles of good and evil, two voices who hold a rhetorical disputation through four books and two thousand lines.

The usual explanation of the frigidity of *Paradise Regained* is the suggestion, which is nearest at hand, viz., that it is the effect of age. Like Ben Jonson's *New Inn*, it betrays the feebleness of senility, and has one of the most certain marks of that stage of authorship, the attempt to imitate himself in those points in which he was once strong. When "glad no more, He wears a face of joy, because He has been glad of yore." Or it is an "œuvre de lassitude," a continuation, with the inevitable defect of continuations, that of preserving the forms and wanting the soul of the original, like the second parts of *Faust*, of *Don Quixote*, and of so many other books.

Both these explanations of the inferiority of *Paradise Regained* have probability. Either of them may be true,

or both may have concurred to the common effect. In favour of the hypothesis of senility is the fact, recorded by Phillips, that Milton "could not hear with patience any such thing when related to him." The reader will please to note that this is the original statement, which the critics have improved into the statement that he preferred *Paradise Regained* to *Paradise Lost*. But his approval of his work, even if it did not amount to preference, looks like the old man's fondness for his youngest and weakest offspring.

Another view of the matter, however, is at least possible. Milton's theory as to the true mode of handling a biblical subject was, as I have said, to add no more dressing, or adventitious circumstance, than should assist the conception of the sacred verity. After he had executed *Paradise Lost*, the suspicion arose that he had been too indulgent to his imagination; that he had created too much. He would make a second experiment, in which he would enforce his theory with more vigour. In the composition of *Paradise Lost* he must have experienced that the constraint he imposed upon himself had generated, as was said of Racine, "a plenitude of soul." He might infer that were the compression carried still further, the reaction of the spirit might be still increased. Poetry he had said long before should be "simple, sensuous, impassioned" (*Tractate of Education*). Nothing enhances passion like simplicity. So in *Paradise Regained* Milton has carried simplicity of dress to the verge of nakedness. It is probably the most unadorned poem extant in any language. He has pushed severe abstinence to the extreme point, possibly beyond the point, where a reader's power is stimulated by the poet's parsimony.

It may elucidate the intention of the author of *Para-*

dise Regained, if we contrast it for a moment with a poem constructed upon the opposite principle, that, viz., of the maximum of adornment. Claudian's *Rape of Proserpine* (A.D. 400) is one of the most rich and elaborate poems ever written. It has in common with Milton the circumstance that its whole action is contained in a solitary event, viz., the carrying off of Proserpine from the vale of Henna by Pluto. All the personages, too, are superhuman; and the incident itself supernatural. Claudian's ambition was to overlay his story with the gold and jewellery of expression and invention. Nothing is named without being carved, decked, and coloured from the inexhaustible resources of the poet's treasury. This is not done with ostentatious pomp, as the hyperbolica heroes of vulgar novelists are painted, but always with taste, which though lavish is discriminating.

Milton, like Wordsworth, urged his theory of parsimony further in practice than he would have done, hac he not been possessed by a spirit of protest against prevailing error. Milton's own ideal was the chiselled austerity of Greek tragedy. But he was impelled to overdo the system of holding back, by his desire to challenge the evil spirit which was abroad. He would separate himself not only from the Clevelands, the Denhams and the Drydens, whom he did not account as poets a all, but even from the Spenserians. Thus, instead o severe, he became rigid, and his plainness is not unfrequently jejune.

"Pomp and ostentation of reading," he had onc written, "is admired among the vulgar; but, in matter of religion, he is learnedest who is plainest." As Wordsworth had attempted to regenerate poetry by recurring to nature and to common objects, Milton would revert t

the pure Word of God. He would present no human adumbration of goodness, but Christ Himself. He saw that here absolute plainness was best. In the presence of this unique Being silence alone became the poet. This "higher argument" was "sufficient of itself" (*Paradise Lost*, ix. 42).

There are some painters whose work appeals only to painters, and not to the public. So the judgment of poets and critics has been more favourable to *Paradise Regained* than the opinion of the average reader. Johnson thinks that "if it had been written, not by Milton, but by some imitators, it would receive universal praise." Wordsworth thought it "the most perfect in execution of anything written by Milton." And Coleridge says of it, "in its kind it is the most perfect poem extant."

There is a school of critics which maintains that a poem is, like a statue or a picture, a work of pure art, of which beauty is the only characteristic of which the reader should be cognisant. And beauty is wholly ideal, an absolute quality, out of relation to person, time, or circumstance. To such readers *Samson Agonistes* will seem tame, [illegible]

cotemporary history, it becomes human, pregnant with real woe, the record of an heroic soul, not baffled by temporary adversity, but totally defeated by an irreversible fate, and unflinchingly accepting the situation, in the firm conviction of the righteousness of the cause. If fiction is truer than fact, fact is more tragic than fiction. In the course of the long struggle of human liberty against the

church, there had been terrible catastrophes. But the St. Bartholomew, the Revocation of the Edict, the Spanish Inquisition, the rule of Alva in the Low Countries,—these and other days of suffering and rebuke have been left to the dull pen of the annalist, who has variously diluted their story in his literary circumlocution office. The triumphant royalist reaction of 1660, when the old serpent bruised the heel of freedom by totally crushing Puritanism, is singular in this, that the agonised cry of the beaten party has been preserved in a cotemporary monument, the intensest utterance of the most intense of English poets—the *Samson Agonistes*.

In the covert representation, which we have in this drama, of the actual wreck of Milton, his party, and his cause, is supplied that real basis of truth which was necessary to inspire him to write. It is of little moment that the incidents of Samson's life do not form a strict parallel to those of Milton's life, or to the career of the Puritan cause. The resemblance lies in the sentiment and situation, not in the bare event. The glorious youth of the consecrated deliverer, his signal overthrow of the Philistine foe with means so inadequate that the hand of God was manifest in the victory; his final humiliation, which he owed to his own weakness and disobedience, and the present revelry and feasting of the uncircumcised Philistines in the temple of their idol,—all these things together constitute a parable of which no reader of Milton's day could possibly mistake the interpretation. More obscurely adumbrated is the day of vengeance, when virtue should return to the repentant backslider, and the idolatrous crew should be smitten with a swift destruction in the midst of their insolent revelry. Add to these the two great personal misfortunes of the poet's life, his first

marriage with a Philistine woman, out of sympathy with him or his cause, and his blindness; and the basis of reality becomes so complete, that the nominal personages of the drama almost disappear behind the history which we read through them.

But while for the biographer of Milton *Samson Agonistes* is charged with a pathos, which as the expression of real suffering no fictive tragedy can equal, it must be felt that as a composition the drama is languid, nerveless, occasionally halting, never brilliant. If the date of the composition of the *Samson* be 1663, this may have been the result of weariness after the effort of *Paradise Lost*. If this drama were composed in 1667, it would be the author's last poetical effort, and the natural explanation would then be that his power over language was failing. The power of metaphor, i.e. of indirect expression, is, according to Aristotle, the characteristic of genius. It springs from vividness of conception of the thing spoken of. It is evident that this intense action of the presentative faculty is no longer at the disposal of the writer of *Samson*. In *Paradise Regained* we are conscious of a purposed restraint of strength [illegible]

Agonistes is a flagging of the forces, a drying up of the rich sources from which had once flowed the golden stream of suggestive phrase which makes *Paradise Lost* a unique monument of the English language. I could almost fancy that the consciousness of decay utters itself in the lines (594)—

> I feel my genial spirits droop,
> My hopes all flat, nature within me seems
> In all her functions weary of herself,

> My race of glory run, and race of shame,
> And I shall shortly be with them that rest.

The point of view I have insisted on is that Milton conceives a poet to be one who employs his imagination to make a revelation of truth, truth which the poet himself entirely believes. One objection to this point of view will at once occur to the reader, the habitual employment in both poems of the fictions of pagan mythology. This is an objection as old as Miltonic criticism. The objection came from those readers who had no difficulty in realising the biblical scenes, or in accepting demoniac agency, but who found their imagination repelled by the introduction of the gods of Greece or Rome. It is not that the biblical heaven and the Greek Olympus are incongruous, but it is that the unreal is blended with the real, in a way to destroy credibility.

To this objection the answer has been supplied by De Quincey. To Milton the personages of the heathen Pantheon were not merely familiar fictions, or established poetical properties; they were evil spirits. That they were so was the creed of the early interpreters. In their demonology, the Hebrew and the Greek poets had a common ground. Up to the advent of Christ, the fallen angels had been permitted to delude mankind. To Milton, as to Jerome, Moloch was Mars, and Chemosh Priapus. Plato knew of hell as Tartarus, and the battle of the giants in Hesiod is no fiction, but an obscured tradition of the war once waged in heaven. What has been adverse to Milton's art of illusion is, that the belief that the gods of the heathen world were the rebellious angels has ceased to be part of the common creed of Christendom. Milton was nearly the last of our great writers who was fully possessed of the doctrine. His readers now no

longer share it with the poet. In Addison's time (1712) some of the imaginary persons in *Paradise Lost* were beginning to make greater demands upon the faith of readers, than those cool rationalistic times could meet.

There is an element of decay and death in poems which we vainly style immortal. Some of the sources of Milton's power are already in process of drying up. I do not speak of the ordinary caducity of language, in virtue of which every effusion of the human spirit is lodged in a body of death. Milton suffers little as yet from this cause. There are few lines in his poems which are less intelligible now, than they were at the time they were written. This is partly to be ascribed to his limited vocabulary, Milton, in his verse, using not more than eight thousand words, or about half the number used by Shakespeare. Nay, the position of our earlier writers has been improved by the mere spread of the English language over a wider area. Addison apologised for *Paradise Lost* falling short of the *Æneid*, because of the inferiority of the language in which it was written. "So divine a poem in English is like a stately palace built of brick." The defects of English for purposes of rhythm and harmony are as great now as they ever were, but the space that our speech fills in the world is vastly increased, and this increase of consideration is reflected back upon our older writers.

But if, as a treasury of poetic speech, *Paradise Lost* has gained by time, it has lost far more as a storehouse

due to the very selection of subject by which Milton sought to secure perpetuity. Not content with being the poet of men, and with describing human passions and ordinary events, he aspired to present the destiny of the whole race of mankind, to tell the story of creation, and to reveal the councils of heaven and hell. And he would raise this structure upon no unstable base, but upon the sure foundation of the written word. It would have been a thing incredible to Milton that the hold of the Jewish Scriptures over the imagination of English men and women could ever be weakened. This process, however, has already commenced. The demonology of the poem has already, with educated readers, passed from the region of fact into that of fiction. Not so universally, but with a large number of readers, the angelology can be no more than what the critics call machinery. And it requires a violent effort from any of our day to accommodate their conceptions to the anthropomorphic theology of *Paradise Lost*. Were the sapping process to continue at the same rate for two more centuries, the possibility of epic illusion would be lost to the whole scheme and economy of the poem. Milton has taken a theme of life for life itself. Had he, in the choice of subject, remembered the principle of the Aristotelean Poetic (which he otherwise highly prized), that men in action are the poet's proper theme, he would have raised his imaginative fabric on a more permanent foundation; upon the appetites, passions, and emotions of men, their vices and virtues, their aims and ambitions, which are a far more constant quantity than any theological system. This perhaps was what Goethe meant, when he pronounced the subject of *Paradise Lost* to be "abominable, with a fair outside, but rotten inwardly."

Whatever fortune may be in store for *Paradise Lost* in the time to come, Milton's choice of subject was, at the time he wrote, the only one which offered him the guarantees of reality, authenticity, and divine truth, which he required. We need not therefore search the annals of literature to find the poem which may have given the first suggestion of the fall of man as a subject. This, however, has been done by curious antiquaries, and a list of more than two dozen authors has been made, from one or other of whom Milton may have taken either the general idea or particular hints for single incidents. Milton, without being a very wide reader, was likely to have seen the *Adamus Exul* of Grotius (1601), and he certainly had read Giles Fletcher's *Christ's Victory and Triumph* (1610). There are traces of verbal reminiscence of Sylvester's translation of *Du Bartas*. But out of the long catalogue of his predecessors there appear only three who can claim to have conceived the same theme with anything like the same breadth, or on the same scale as Milton has done. These are the so-called Cædmon, Andreini, and Vondel.

1. The anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem which passes under the name of Cædmon has this one point of resemblance to the plot of *Paradise Lost*, that in it the seduction of Eve is Satan's revenge for his expulsion from heaven. As Francis Junius was much occupied upon this poem, of which he published the text in 1655, it is likely enough that he should have talked of it with his friend Milton.

2. Voltaire related that Milton during his tour in Italy (1638) had seen performed *L'Adamo*, a sacred drama by the Florentine Giovanni Battista Andreini, and that he "took from that ridiculous trifle" the hint of the "noblest product of human imagination." Though Voltaire relate

this as a matter of fact, it is doubtful if it be more than an *on dit* which he had picked up in London society. Voltaire could not have seen Andreini's drama, for it is not at all a ridiculous trifle. Though much of the dialogue is as insipid as dialogue in operettas usually is, there is great invention in the plot, and animation in the action. Andreini is incessantly offending against taste, and is infected with the vice of the Marinists, the pursuit of *concetti*, or far-fetched analogies between things unlike. His infernal personages are grotesque and disgusting, rather than terrible; his scenes in heaven childish —at once familiar and fantastic, in the style of the Mysteries of the age before the drama. With all these faults the *Adamo* is a lively and spirited representation of the Hebrew legend, and not unworthy to have been the antecedent of *Paradise Lost*. There is no question of plagiarism, for the resemblance is not even that of imitation or parentage, or adoption. The utmost that can be conceded is to concur in Hayley's opinion that, either in representation or in perusal, the *Adamo* of Andreini had made an impression on the mind of Milton; had, as Voltaire says, revealed to him the hidden majesty of the subject. There had been at least three editions of the *Adamo* by 1641, and Milton may have brought one of these with him, among the books which he had shipped from Venice, even, if he had not seen the drama on the Italian stage, or had not, as Todd suggests, met Andreini in person.

So much appears to me to be certain from the internal evidence of the two compositions as they stand. But there are further some slight corroborative circumstances. (1.) The Trinity College sketch, so often referred to, of Milton's scheme when it was intended to be dramatic,

keeps much more closely, both in its personages and in its ordering, to Andreini. (ii.) In Phillips's *Theatrum Poetarum*, a compilation in which he had his uncle's help, Andreini is mentioned as author "of a fantastic poem entitled Olivastro, which was printed at Bologna, 1642." If Andreini was known to Edward Phillips, the inference is that he was known to Milton.

3. Lastly, though external evidence is here wanting, it cannot be doubted that Milton was acquainted with the *Lucifer* of the Dutch poet, Joost van den Vondel, which appeared in 1654. This poem is a regular five-act drama in the Dutch language, a language which Milton was able to read. In spite of commercial rivalry and naval war there was much intercourse between the two republics, and Amsterdam books came in regular course to London. The Dutch drama turns entirely on the revolt of the angels, and their expulsion from heaven, the fall of man being but a subordinate incident. In *Paradise Lost* the relation of the two events is inverted, the fall of the angels being there an episode, not transacted, but told by one of the personages of the epic. It is therefore only in one book of *Paradise Lost*, the sixth, that the influence of Vondel can be looked for. There may possibly occur in other parts of our epic single lines of which an original may be found in Vondel's drama. Notably such a one is the often-quoted—

> Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.
> *Paradise Lost*, I. 263.

which is Vondel's—

> En liever d'eerste Vorst in eenigh lager hof
> Dan in't gezaligt licht de tweede, of noch een minder!

But it is in the sixth book only in which anything more

than a verbal similarity is traceable. According to Mr. Gosse, who has given an analysis, with some translated extracts, of Vondel's *Lucifer*, the resemblances are too close and too numerous to be mere coincidences. Vondel is more human than Milton, just where human attributes are unnatural, so that heaven is made to seem like earth, while in *Paradise Lost* we always feel that we are in a region aloft. Miltonic presentation has a dignity and elevation, which is not only wanting but is sadly missed in the Dutch drama, even the language of which seems common and familiar.

The poems now mentioned form, taken together, the antecedents of *Paradise Lost*. In no one instance, taken singly, is the relation of Milton to a predecessor that of imitation, not even to the extent in which the Æneid, for instance, is an imitation of the Iliad and Odyssey. The originality of Milton lies not in his subject, but in his manner; not in his thoughts, but in his mode of thinking. His story and his personages, their acts and words, had been the common property of all poets since the fall of the Roman Empire. Not only the three I have specially named had boldly attempted to set forth a mythical representation of the origin of evil, but many others had fluttered round the same central object of poetic attraction. Many of these productions Milton had read, and they had made their due impression on his mind according to their degree of force. When he began to compose *Paradise Lost* he had the reading of a life-time behind him. His imagination worked upon an accumulated store, to which books, observation, and reflection had contributed in equal proportions. He drew upon this store without conscious distinction of its sources. Not that this was a recollected material, to which the poet had recourse whenever inven-

tion failed him; it was identified with himself. His verse flowed from his own soul, but his was a soul which had grown up nourished with the spoil of all the ages. He created his epic, as metaphysicians have said that God created the world, by drawing it out of himself, not by building it up out of elements supplied *ab extra*.

The resemblances to earlier poets, Greek, Latin, Italian, which could be pointed out in *Paradise Lost*, were so numerous that in 1695, only twenty-one years after Milton's death, an editor, one Patrick Hume, a schoolmaster in the neighbourhood of London, was employed by Tonson to point out the imitations in an annotated edition. From that time downwards, the diligence of our literary antiquaries has been busily employed in the same track of research, and it has been extended to the English poets, a field which was overlooked, or not known to the first collector. The result is a valuable accumulation of parallel passages, which have been swept up into our *variorum* Miltons, and make *Paradise Lost*, for English phraseology, what Virgil was for Latin in the middle ages, the centre round which the study moves. The learner, who desires to cultivate his feeling for the fine shades and variations of expression, has here a rich opportunity, and will acknowledge with gratitude the laborious services of Newton, Pearce, the Wartons, Todd, Mitford, and other compilers. But these heaped-up citations of parallel passages somewhat tend to hide from us the secret of Miltonic language. We are apt to think that the magical effect of Milton's words has been produced by painfully inlaying tesseræ of borrowed metaphor—a mosaic of bits culled from extensive reading, carried along by a retentive memory, and pieced together so as to produce a new whole, with the exquisite art of a Japanese cabinet-maker. It is some-

times admitted that Milton was a plagiary, but it is urged in extenuation that his plagiarisms were always reproduced in finer forms.

It is not in the spirit of vindicating Milton, but as touching the mystery of metrical language, that I dwell a few moments upon this misconception. It is true that Milton has a way of making his own even what he borrows. While Horace's thefts from Alcaeus or Pindar are palpable, even from the care which he takes to Latinise them, Milton cannot help transfusing his own nature into the words he adopts. But this is far from all. When Milton's widow was asked "if he did not often read Homer and Virgil, she understood it as an imputation upon him for stealing from those authors, and answered with eagerness, that he stole from nobody but the muse who inspired him." This is more true than she knew. It is true there are many phrases or images in *Paradise Lost* taken from earlier writers—taken, not stolen, for the borrowing is done openly. When Adam, for instance, begs Raphael to prolong his discourse deep into night,—

> Sleep, listening to thee, will watch;
> Or we can bid his absence, till thy song
> End, and dismiss thee ere the morning shine;

we cannot be mistaken in saying that we have here a conscious reminiscence of the words of Alcinous to Ulysses in the eleventh book of the Odyssey. Such imitation is on the surface, and does not touch the core of that mysterious combination of traditive with original elements in diction, which Milton and Virgil, alone of poets known to us, have effected. Here and there, many times, in detached places, Milton has consciously imitated. But, beyond this obvious indebtedness, there runs through the whole

texture of his verse a suggestion of secondary meaning, a meaning which has been accreted to the words, by their passage down the consecrated stream of classical poetry. Milton quotes very little for a man of much reading. He says of himself (*Judgment of Bucer*) that he "never could delight in long citations, much less in whole traductions, whether it be natural disposition or education in me, or that my mother bore me a speaker of what God made mine own, and not a translator." And the observation is as old as Bishop Newton, that "there is scarce any author who has written so much, and upon such various subjects, and yet quotes so little from his cotemporary authors." It is said that "he could repeat Homer almost all without book." But we know that common minds are apt to explain to themselves the working of mental superiority, by exaggerating the power of memory. Milton's own writings remain a sufficient evidence that his was not a verbal memory. And, psychologically, the power of imagination and the power of verbal memory, are almost always found in inverse proportion.

Milton's diction is the elaborated outcome of all the best words of all antecedent poetry, not by a process of recollected reading and storage, but by the same mental habit by which we learn to speak our mother tongue. Only, in the case of the poet, the vocabulary acquired has a new meaning superadded to the words, from the occasion on which they have been previously employed by others. Words, over and above their dictionary signification, connote all the feeling which has gathered round them by reason of their employment through a hundred generations of song. In the words of Mr. Myers, "without ceasing to be a logical step in the argument, a phrase becomes a centre of emotional force. The complex associations which

it evokes, modify the associations evoked by other words in the same passage, in a way distinct from logical or grammatical connection." The poet suggests much more than he says, or as Milton himself has phrased it, "more is meant than meets the ear."

For the purposes of poetry a thought is the representative of many feelings, and a word is the representative of many thoughts. A single word may thus set in motion in us the vibration of a feeling first consigned to letters 3000 years ago. For oratory words should be winged, that they may do their work of persuasion. For poetry words should be freighted with associations of feeling, that they may awaken sympathy. It is the suggestive power of words that the poet cares for, rather than their current denotation. How laughable are the attempts of the commentators to interpret a line in Virgil as they would a sentence in Aristotle's *Physics!* Milton's secret lies in his mastery over the rich treasure of this inherited vocabulary. He wielded it as his own, as a second mother-tongue, the native and habitual idiom of his thought and feeling, backed by a massive frame of character, and "a power which is got within me to a passion." (*Areopagitica.*)

When Wordsworth came forward at the end of the eighteenth century with his famous reform of the language of English poetry, the Miltonic diction was the current coin paid out by every versifier. Wordsworth revolted against this dialect as unmeaning, hollow, gaudy, and inane. His reform consisted in dropping the conventional phraseology altogether, and reverting to the common language of ordinary life. It was necessary to do this in order to reconnect poetry with the sympathies of men, and make it again a true utterance instead of the ingenious exercise in

putting together words, which it had become. In projecting this abandonment of the received tradition, it may be thought that Wordsworth was condemning the Miltonic system of expression in itself. But this was not so. Milton's language had become in the hands of the imitators of the eighteenth century sound without sense, a husk without the kernel, a body of words without the soul of poetry. Milton had created and wielded an instrument which was beyond the control of any less than himself. He used it as a living language; the poetasters of the eighteenth century wrote it as a dead language, as boys make Latin verses. Their poetry is to *Paradise Lost*, as a modern Gothic restoration is to a genuine middle-age church. It was against the feeble race of imitators, and not against the master himself, that the protest of the lake poet was raised. He proposed to do away with the Miltonic vocabulary altogether, not because it was in itself vicious, but because it could now only be employed at secondhand.

[illegible]

learnt Welsh; an English poem is only for those who understand English. But of understanding English there are many degrees; it requires some education to understand literary style at all. A large majority of the natives of any country possess, and use, only a small fraction of their mother tongue. These people may be left out of the discussion. Confining ourselves only to that small part of our millions which we speak of as the educated classes, that is those whose schooling is carried on beyond fourteen years of age, it will be found that only a small fraction of

the men, and a still smaller fraction of the women, fully apprehend the meaning of words. This is the case with what is written in the ordinary language of books. When we pass from a style in which words have only their simple signification, to a style of which the effect depends on the suggestion of collateral association, we leave behind the majority even of these few. This is what is meant by the standing charge against Milton that he is too learned.

It is no paradox to say that Milton was not a learned man. Such men there were in his day, Usher, Selden, Voss, in England; in Holland, Milton's adversary Salmasius, and many more. A learned man was one who could range freely and surely over the whole of classical and patristic remains in the Greek and Latin languages (at least), with the accumulated stores of philological, chronological, historical criticism, necessary for the interpretation of those remains. Milton had neither made these acquisitions, nor aimed at them. He even expresses himself, in his vehement way, with contempt of them. "Hollow antiquities sold by the seeming bulk," "marginal stuffings," "horse-loads of citations and fathers," are some of his petulant outbursts against the learning that had been played upon his position by his adversaries. He says expressly that he had "not read the Councils, save here and there" (Smectymnuus). His own practice had been "industrious and select reading." He chose to make himself a scholar rather than a learned man. The aim of his studies was to improve faculty, not to acquire knowledge. "Who would be a poet must himself be a true poem;" his heart should "contain of just, wise, good, the perfect shape." He devoted himself to self-preparation with the assiduity of Petrarch or of Goethe. "In [illegible]

some labour and studious watchings I have tired out almost a whole youth." "Labour and intense study I take to be my portion in this life." He would know, not all, but "what was of use to know," and form himself by assiduous culture. The first Englishman to whom the designation of our series, *Men of Letters*, is appropriate, Milton was also the noblest example of the type. He cultivated, not letters, but himself, and sought to enter into possession of his own mental kingdom, not that he might reign there, but that he might royally use its resources in building up a work, which should bring honour to his country and his native tongue.

The style of *Paradise Lost* is then only the natural expression of a soul thus exquisitely nourished upon the best thoughts and finest words of all ages. It is the language of one who lives in the companionship of the great and the wise of past time. It is inevitable that when such a one speaks, his tones, his accent, the melodies of his rhythm, the inner harmonies of his linked thoughts, the grace of his allusive touch, should escape the common ear. To follow Milton one should at least have tasted the same training through which he put himself. "Te quoque dignum finge deo." The many cannot see it, and complain that the poet is too learned. They would have Milton talk like Bunyan or William Cobbett, whom they understand. Milton did attempt the demagogue in his pamphlets, only with the result of blemishing his fame and degrading his genius. The best poetry is that which calls upon us to rise to it, not that which writes down to us.

Milton knew that his was not the road to popularity. He thirsted for renown, but he did not confound renown with vogue. A poet has his choice between the many and the few; Milton chose the few. "Paucis hujusmodi

lectoribus contentus," is his own inscription in a copy of his pamphlets sent by him to Patrick Young. He derived a stern satisfaction from the reprobation with which the vulgar visited him. His divorce tracts were addressed to men who dared to think, and ran the town "numbering good intellects." His poems he wished laid up in the Bodleian Library, "where the jabber of common people cannot penetrate, and whence the base throng of readers keep aloof" (*Ode to Rouse*). If Milton resembled a Roman republican in the severe and stoic elevation of his character, he also shared the aristocratic intellectualism of the classical type. He is in marked contrast to the levelling hatred of excellence, the Christian trades-unionism of the model Catholic of the mould of S. François de Sales, whose maxim of life is "marchons avec la troupe de nos frères et compagnons, doucement, paisiblement, et aimablement." To Milton the people are—

> But a herd confused,
> A miscellaneous rabble, who extol
> Things vulgar.
>
> *Paradise Regained*, iii. 49.

At times his indignation carries him past the courtesies of equal speech, to pour out the vials of prophetic rebuke, when he contemplates the hopeless struggle of those who are the salt of the earth, "amidst the throng and noises of vulgar and irrational men" (*Tenure of Kings*), and he rates them to their face as "owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs" (*Sonnet* xii.); not because they will not listen to him, but because they "hate learning more than toad or asp" (*Sonnet* xi.).

Milton's attitude must be distinguished from patrician pride, or the *noli me tangere* of social exclusiveness. Nor, again, was it, like Callimachus's, the fastidious repulsion

of a delicate taste for the hackneyed in literary expression; it was the lofty disdain of aspiring virtue for the sordid and ignoble.

Various ingredients, constitutional or circumstantial, concurred to produce this repellent or unsympathetic attitude in Milton. His dogmatic Calvinism, from the effects of which his mind never recovered—a system which easily disposes to a cynical abasement of our fellow-men—counted for something. Something must be set down to habitual converse with the classics—a converse which tends to impart to character, as Platner said of Godfrey Hermann, "a certain grandeur and generosity, removed from the spirit of cabal and mean cunning which prevail among men of the world." His blindness threw him out of the competition of life, and back upon himself, in a way which was sure to foster egotism. These were constitutional elements of that aloofness from men which characterised all his utterance. These disposing causes became inexorable fate, when, by the turn of the political wheel of fortune, he found himself alone amid the mindless dissipation and reckless materialism of the Restoration. He felt himself then at war with human society as constituted around him, and was thus driven to withdraw himself within a poetic world of his own creation.

In this antagonism of the poet to his age much was lost; much energy was consumed in what was mere friction. The artist is then most powerful when he finds himself in accord with the age he lives in. The plenitude of art is only reached when it marches with the sentiments which possess a community. The defiant attitude easily slides into paradox, and the mind falls in love with its own wilfulness. The exceptional emergence

of Milton's three poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Regained*, and *Samson*, deeply colours their context. The greatest achievements of art in their kinds have been the capital specimens of a large crop; as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the picked lines out of many rhapsodies, and Shakespeare the king of an army of contemporary dramatists. Milton was a survival, felt himself such, and resented it.

> Unchang'd,
> . . . . . Though fall'n on evil days,
> On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
> In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round,
> And solitude.
>
> *Paradise Lost*, vii. 24.

Poetry thus generated we should naturally expect to meet with more admiration than sympathy. And such, on the whole, has been Milton's reception. In 1678, twenty years after the publication of *Paradise Lost*, Prior spoke of him (*Hind transversed*) as "a rough, unhewn fellow, that a man must sweat to read him." And in 1812, Hallam had doubts "if *Paradise Lost*, published eleven years since, would have met with a greater demand" than it did at first. It has been much disputed by historians of our literature what inference is to be drawn from the numbers sold of *Paradise Lost* at its first publication. Between 1667 and 1678, a space of twenty years, three editions had been printed, making together some 4500 copies. Was this a large or a small circulation? Opinions are at variance on the point. Johnson and Hallam thought it a large sale, as books went at that time. Campbell, and the majority of our annalists of books, have considered it as evidence of neglect. Comparison with what is known of other cases of circulation leads to no more certain conclusion. On

the one hand, the public could not take more than three editions—say 3000 copies—of the plays of Shakespeare in sixty years, from 1623 to 1684. If this were a fair measure of possible circulation at the time, we should have to pronounce Milton's sale a great success. On the other hand, Cleveland's poems ran through sixteen or seventeen editions in about thirty years. If this were the average output of a popular book, the inference would be that *Paradise Lost* was not such a book.

Whatever conclusion may be the true one from the amount of the public demand, we cannot be wrong in asserting that from the first, and now as then, *Paradise Lost* has been more admired than read. The poet's wish and expectation that he should find "fit audience, though few," has been fulfilled. Partly this has been due to his limitation, his unsympathetic disposition, the deficiency of the human element in his imagination, and his presentation of mythical instead of real beings. But it is also in part a tribute to his excellence, and is to be ascribed to the lofty strain which requires more effort to accompany, than an average reader is able to make, a majestic demeanour which no parodist has been able to degrade, and a wealth of allusion demanding more literature than is possessed by any but the few whose life is lived with the poets. An appreciation of Milton is the last reward of consummated scholarship; and we may apply to him what Quintilian has said of Cicero, "Ille se profecisse sciat, cui Cicero valde placebit."

Causes other than the inherent faults of the poem long continued to weigh down the reputation of *Paradise Lost*. In Great Britain the sense for art, poetry, literature, is confined to a few, while our political life has been diffused and vigorous. Hence all judgment, even

upon a poet, is biassed by considerations of party. Before 1688 it was impossible that the poet, who had justified regicide, could have any public beyond the suppressed and crouching Nonconformists. The Revolution of 1688 removed this ban, and from that date forward the Liberal party in England adopted Milton as the republican poet. William Hogg, writing in 1690, says of *Paradise Lost* that "the fame of the poem is spread through the whole of England, but being written in English, it is as yet unknown in foreign lands." This is obvious exaggeration. Lauder, about 1748, gives the date exactly, when he speaks of "that infinite tribute of veneration that has been paid to him *these sixty years past*." One distinguished exception there was. Dryden, royalist and Catholic though he was, was loyal to his art. Nothing which Dryden ever wrote is so creditable to his taste, as his being able to see, and daring to confess, in the day of disesteem, that the regicide poet alone deserved the honour which his cotemporaries were for rendering to himself. Dryden's saying, "This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too," is not perfectly well vouched, but it would hardly have been invented, if it had not been known to express his sentiments. And Dryden's sense of Milton's greatness grew with his taste. When, in the preface to his *State of Innocence* (1674), Dryden praised *Paradise Lost*, he "knew not half the extent of its excellence," John Dennis says, "as more than twenty years afterwards he confessed to me." Had he known it, he never could have produced his vulgar parody, *The State of Innocence*, a piece upon which he received the compliments of his cotemporaries, as "having refined the ore of Milton."

With the one exception of Dryden, a better critic than

poet, Milton's repute was the work of the Whigs. The first *édition de luxe* of *Paradise Lost* (1688) was brought out by a subscription got up by the Whig leader, Lord Somers. In this edition Dryden's pinchbeck epigram so often quoted, first appeared—

Three poets in three distant ages born, &c.

It was the Whig essayist, Addison, whose papers in the *Spectator* (1712) did most to make the poem popularly known. In 1737, in the height of the Whig ascendancy, the bust of Milton penetrated Westminster Abbey, though, in the generation before, the Dean of that day had refused to admit an inscription on the monument erected to John Phillips, because the name of Milton occurred in it.

The zeal of the Liberal party in the propagation of the cult of Milton was of course encountered by an equal passion on the part of the Tory opposition. They were exasperated by the lustre which was reflected upon Revolution principles by the name of Milton. About the middle of the eighteenth century, when Whig popularity was already beginning to wane, a desperate attempt was made by a rising Tory pamphleteer to crush the new Liberal idol. Dr. Johnson, the most vigorous writer of the day, conspired with one William Lauder, a native of Scotland seeking fortune in London, to stamp out Milton's credit by proving him to be a wholesale plagiarist. Milton's imitations—he had gathered pearls wherever they were to be found—were thus to be turned into an indictment against him. One of the beauties of *Paradise Lost* is, as has been already said, the scholar's flavour of literary reminiscence which hangs about its words and images. This Virgilian art, in which Milton has surpassed his master, was represented by this pair of literary bandits as theft, and held

to prove at once moral obliquity and intellectual feebleness. This line of criticism was well chosen; it was, in fact, an appeal to the many from the few. Unluckily for the plot, Lauder was not satisfied with the amount of resemblance shown by real parallel passages. He ventured upon the bold step of forging verses, closely resembling lines in *Paradise Lost*, and ascribing these verses to older poets. He even forged verses which he quoted as if from *Paradise Lost*, and showed them as Milton's plagiarisms from preceding writers. Even these clumsy fictions might have passed without detection at that uncritical period of our literature, and under the shelter of the name of Samuel Johnson. But Lauder's impudence grew with the success of his criticisms, which he brought out as letters, through a series of years, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. There was a translation of *Paradise Lost* into Latin hexameters, which had been made in 1690 by William Hogg. Lauder inserted lines, taken from this translation, into passages taken from Masenius, Staphorstius, Taubmannus, neo-Latin poets, whom Milton had, or might have read, and presented these passages as thefts by Milton.

Low as learning had sunk in England in 1750, Hogg's Latin *Paradisus amissa* was just the book, which tutors of colleges who could teach Latin verses had often in their hands. Mr. Bowle, a tutor of Oriel College, Oxford, immediately recognised an old acquaintance in one or two of the interpolated lines. This put him upon the scent, he submitted Lauder's passages to a closer investigation, and the whole fraud was exposed. Johnson, who was not concerned in the cheat, and was only guilty of indolence and party spirit, saved himself by sacrificing his comrade. He afterwards took ample revenge for the mortification of this exposure, in his *Lives of the Poets*, in which he en-

ployed all his vigorous powers and consummate skill to write down Milton. He undoubtedly dealt a heavy blow at the poet's reputation, and succeeded in damaging it for at least two generations of readers. He did for Milton what Aristophanes did for Socrates, effaced the real man and replaced him by a distorted and degrading caricature.

It was again a clergyman to whom Milton owed his vindication from Lauder's onslaught. John Douglas, afterwards bishop of Salisbury, brought Bowle's materials before the public. But the high Anglican section of English life has never thoroughly accepted Milton. R. S. Hawker, vicar of Morwenstow, himself a poet of real feeling, gave expression, in rabid abuse of Milton, to the antipathy which more judicious churchmen suppress. Even the calm and gentle author of the *Christian Year*, wide heart ill-sorted with a narrow creed, deliberately framed a theory of Poetic for the express purpose, as it would seem, of excluding the author of *Paradise Lost* from the first class of poets.

But a work such as Milton has constructed, at once intense and elaborate, firmly knit and broadly laid, can afford to wait. Time is all in its favour, and against its detractors. The Church never forgives, and faction does not die out. But Milton has been, for two centuries, getting beyond the reach of party feeling, whether of friends or foes. In each national aggregate an instinct is always at work, an instinct not equal to exact discrimination of lesser degrees of merit, but surely finding out the chief forces which have found expression in the native tongue. This instinct is not an active faculty, and so exposed to the influences which warp the will, it is a passive deposition from unconscious impression. Our appreciation of our poet is not to be measured by our choosing him for our

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favourite closet companion, or reading him often. As Voltaire wittily said of Dante, "Sa reputation s'affirmera toujours, parce qu'on ne le lit guère." We shall prefer to read the fashionable novelist of each season as it passes, but we shall choose to be represented at the international congress of world poets by Shakespeare and Milton; Shakespeare first, and next MILTON.

INDEX.

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